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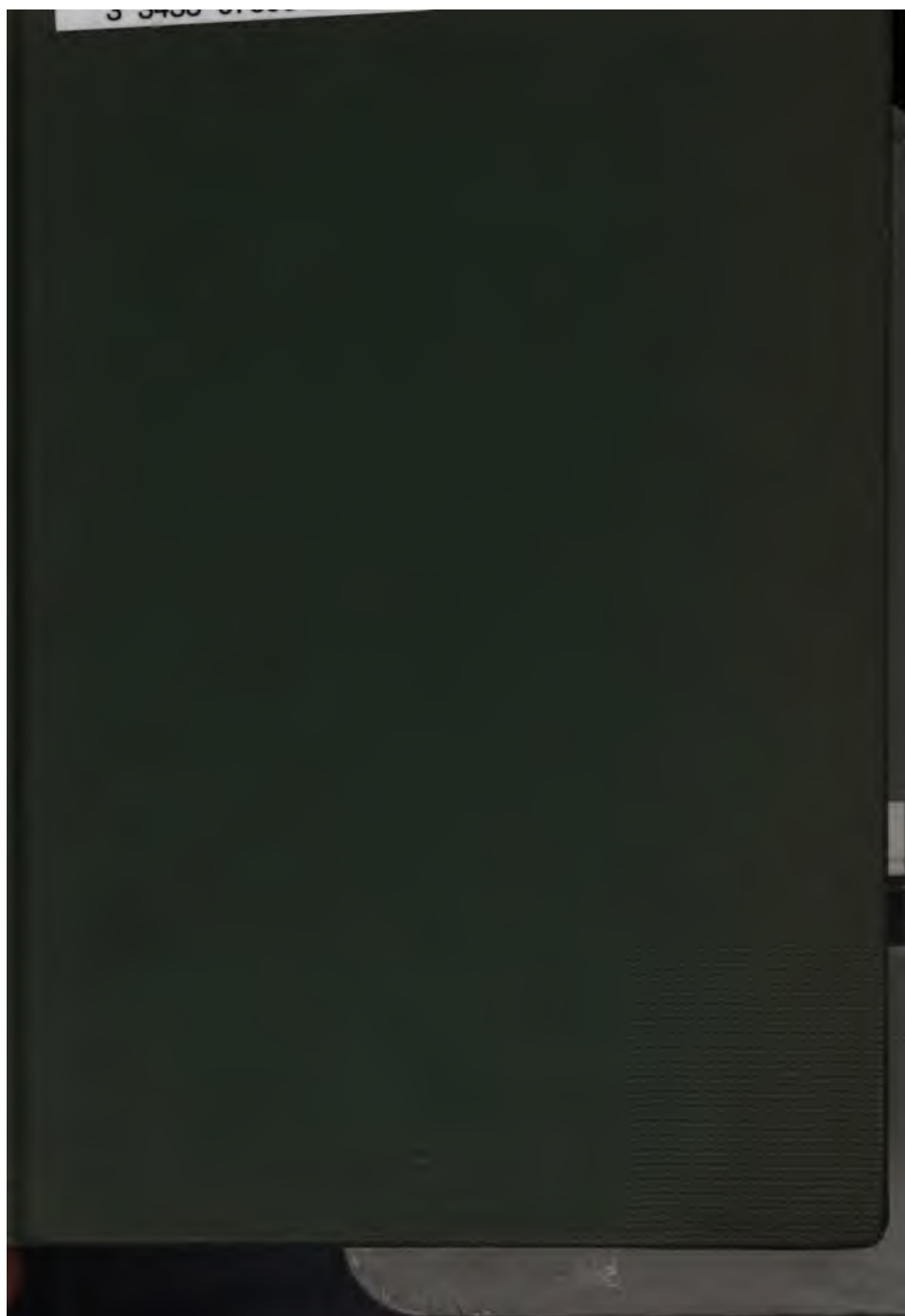
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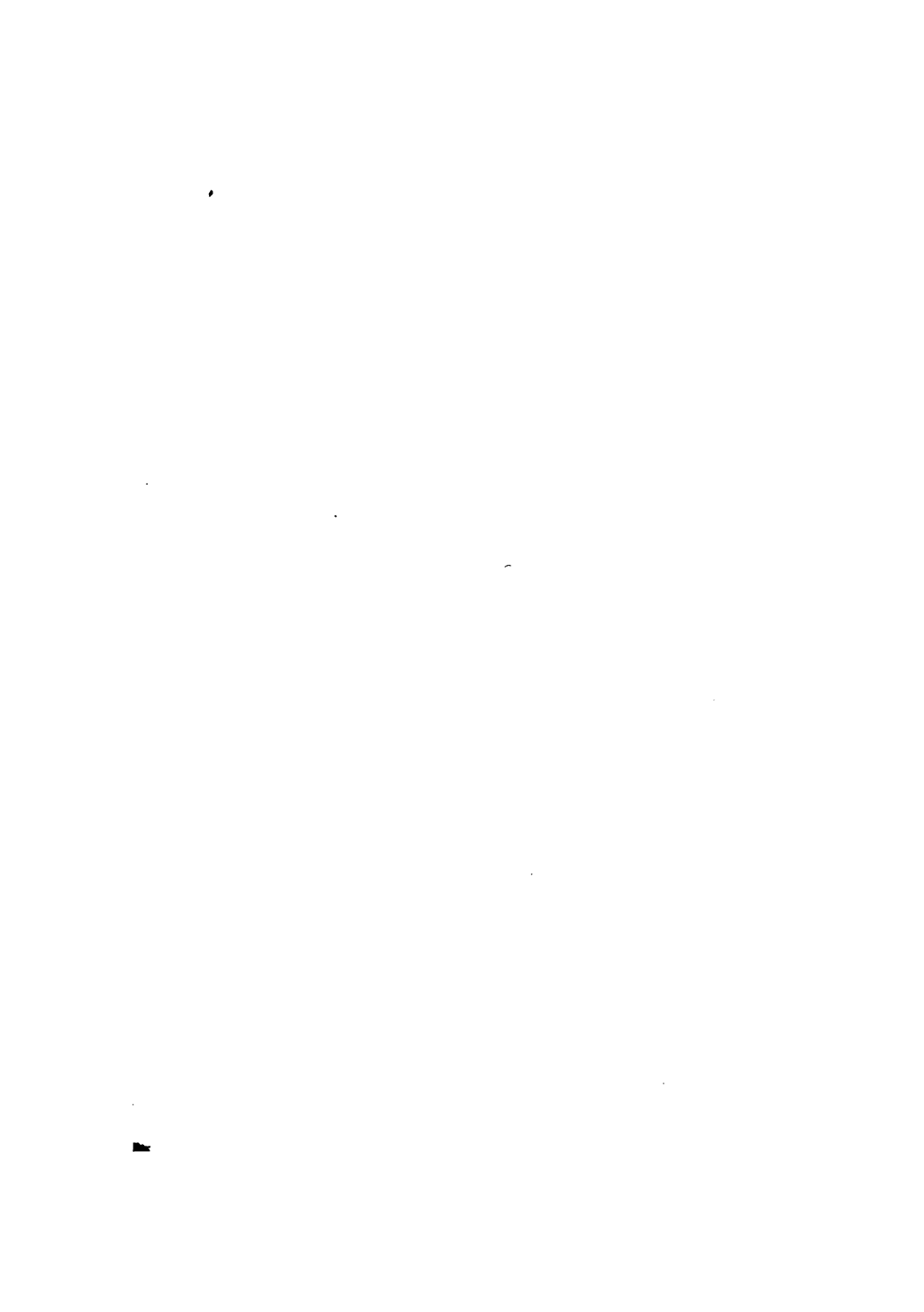








THE EDGE OF HAZARD



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“Gentlemen, for shame !” cried the Princess *Page 351*

1078-

THE EDGE OF HAZARD

By
GEORGE HORTON

Author of
The Long Straight Road
Like Another Helen, etc.

1

"I'll strive to bear it for her worthy sake
To the extreme edge of hazard."
All's Well That Ends Well

WITH PICTURES BY
C. M. RELYEA

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TO MY MOTHER

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THE EDGE OF HAZARD

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
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THE EDGE OF HAZARD

CHAPTER I

AN ADVENTURE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Frederick Courtland Hardy, ex-member of Mrs. Johnny Folkstone's smart set, of Boston, ex-cotillion leader, yachtsman and clubman, was on his way to Russia to take charge of one of the American Trading Company's stores, at Stryetensk. He had lost his money and his fair-weather friends, and had been jilted by a girl who, as it proved, was not the ideal of nobility and womanly grace he had supposed her to be. Though plucky, he was, to use an expression more forceful than elegant, "sore." Had he but known it, the escape from the girl was a bit of good luck sufficient to compensate him for the loss of his wealth; for no woman who deserts a man at the first blast of misfortune is good to tie to for a lifetime. He did not realize this, for it is hard to be philosophical when a man has just lost his girl, his friends and his money.

He received his appointment to Siberia through a friend of his father's, old Frederick Emery, who had gone out to that country some years before and came back to Boston on a visit, rich and eloquent of the resources and possibilities of that great empire so little known and understood by Americans.

"A frozen region? A country of horrors, a land fit only for convicts?" Emery shouted indignantly. "Nonsense! It's a land of wide and fertile plains, on which the flocks of the world might graze; a land of unparalleled opportunities, of unimaginable wealth, of exhaustless resources. It's the most promising undeveloped country on the face of the globe, waiting only for youth and brains and enterprise to make it the most prosperous region in the world. All along the Amur River are towns growing like mushrooms, of which you never heard, and whose names you couldn't pronounce if you saw them in print. They have wide streets, electric lights, department stores, modern buildings. The American Trading Company has established a string of stores on the Amur and our profits are enormous. Your father helped me out once when I was in a hole. He's dead now, but I'd like to pay back in some way the debt I owe him, to his heir and successor. Don't sit around here moping over the loss of your money. You're

only twenty-eight, and the world is all before you. We'll make you manager of our new store at Stryetensk at a salary and commission. We'll send you out there and advance you enough money to pay your expenses. You've been sort o' spoiled by lolling on a yacht and hanging to women's apron-strings, but if you've got any of old Tom Hardy's stuff in you, you'll pull through yet. I believe you have, for you look enough like him. What do you say, my boy, will you go?"

"I will!" Hardy replied, taking one of those sudden and unexpected resolves that change the whole course of a man's life. He did not even take the trouble to look up Stryetensk on the map. It sounded far away to him, and he felt a desire to go as far from Boston as possible: that yearning for distance which sometimes takes possession of a man and is coupled with the feeling that he would like to escape from himself.

Hardy gained his first impression of Japan from the deck of the magnificent *Empress of India*, of the Canadian Pacific line. After that long, lonely run of forty-three hundred miles across the Pacific, they came one morning early into a vivid, though dark blue sea, swarming with tiny islands and flecked with numerous sailing craft. In the distance, the

low, friendly hills of Nippon lay dreaming in a luminous mist. The fertility, European progress and enterprise of this land were attested at breakfast by the magnificent strawberries, which had evidently been brought on board in the early hours by an outcoming bumboat; and a Japanese youth, who had been studying the tobacco industry in America, gave voice to the patriotism of its inhabitants by exclaiming as he stood by the rail, "Oh, I could swim ashore!" Hardy noticed tears in his eyes.

The series of adventures that caused the ex-cotillion leader to forget his troubles began at Yokohama, and dated with his first meeting with Stapleton Neville in the dining-room of the Grand Hotel. The two men were seated together at a small table, and the American was gazing dreamily over the room, most probably thinking of the girl who dropped him when he lost his money.

"It's a jolly gay scene, isn't it?" remarked his vis-à-vis, smiling pleasantly. He was a florid blond man, with the peachy complexion of a Swede, rather thick lips and nostrils, a square chin, the bluest of blue eyes and white even teeth like those of a young dog. His expansive shirtbosom, for he was in evening dress, displayed to the best advantage his depth of chest.

"The English always dress for dinner," reflected Hardy. "They feel that they are merely eating, and not dining, unless they dress."

If further proof were needed of the man's nationality, it lay in his pronounced accent, and the fact that he had not spoken a dozen words without making use of a British idiom. It was a gay scene, and Hardy admitted the fact, his dark eyes lighting with sudden animation. They were in an immense dining-hall, brilliantly lighted by electricity, the tables beautifully decorated with a profusion of flowers. The place was crowded, and many of the guests were attired as for some official reception, or high social function. The bill of fare, which the quiet little waiter brought and laid deferentially on the table, contained a list of eatables and drinkables that would have done credit to the best establishments of London or Paris.

"These people seem to be all Americans," remarked Hardy. They looked like Americans, and the accent of those passing by, or sitting near enough to be heard, was unmistakable.

"Yes," replied the other, "I suppose they are, nearly all of them. The show places of Japan are thronged with your countrymen at this season, and they make fashionable resorts of them. I have been

staying here for several months, and I do believe I'm about the only Englishman here. Permit me to introduce myself,"—and here he produced a card, bearing the name, "Stapleton Neville, Travelers Club, London."

"My countrymen," replied Hardy, offering his own card, "have a way of taking America with them wherever they go. They travel to the ends of the earth to get out of their own land and then they so thoroughly Americanize their favorite foreign resorts, that they might quite as well have stayed at home."

They went out on the veranda after dinner to smoke their cigars, and there Hardy was better satisfied. True, the Japanese band was working away with great enthusiasm and perfect confidence at a Sousa march, but they played it execrably, and so could be forgiven. They made Hardy feel that this, at any rate, was not the land of Sousa marches and cotillions. Across the street, leaning against a fence, were several Japanese girls, in their dainty picturesque costume, listening to the music. They were pretty—very pretty—and they laughed frequently in a shy coquettish way. One felt that they were joking each other about their almond-eyed lovers. Deeper in the shadow, where another girl was stand-

ing, a cigarette glowed and faded at intervals, like the light of a firefly.

"When do you leave?" asked Neville.

"The day after to-morrow," replied Hardy. "I am on my way to Russia on business, and I am supposed to get there with as little delay as possible."

"But there is no boat starting for a week. You can't very well leave for Vladivostok day after to-morrow."

Hardy smiled.

"You forget our American enterprise," he replied. "I have learned that a small boat leaves Hakodate in three days, crossing the Japan Sea, and that by taking the train northward through the island, I shall arrive at Aomori, near the northern end of Nippon, in time to connect with this boat. I have already had the agent here telegraph for passage for me. I shall thus save a week's time, and shall be able to see, from a car window, the interior of Japan,—that portion of the country which our friends in the dining-room there get little idea of."

"By Jove! Do you know that would jolly well fit in with my plans, if you wouldn't object to a traveling companion and there should be room for me, also?"

"I'd be delighted," replied Hardy; "charmed, I

assure you, to have you come along. Traveling alone is a bore. Shall you be going through to Aomori?"

"Farther than that. I, too, am going to Russia, through to Moscow, and from there back to England."

"Why, then," exclaimed Hardy, "I shall have you as far as my destination, Stryetensk!"

"Exactly so. And, as we are leaving the town so soon, what do you say to our prowling about tomorrow, to give you an idea of the bally place, and to taking it in in the evening in a jinrikisha? It's very picturesque, both by night and by day, and you'll not find me a poor guide, as I have knocked around considerably since I have been here."

The American fell in with this plan gratefully, and thought himself in good luck that he was about to have for a guide an Anglo-Saxon who knew the principal places of interest, and possessed a slight command of the language. Neville, he learned, had been in the country something over three months.

They were out early the next morning and spent the entire day tramping about the fascinating streets of the Japanese city.

"Did you bring your camera with you?" Neville asked Hardy, as the latter appeared on the veranda of the hotel, where he found his new-made friend

waiting. "There's a deal to photograph and these people are certainly picturesque, even if they aren't much else."

"Will they allow one to take photographs?" asked Hardy.

"Oh, certainly. There are no restrictions, whatever. Their civilization is imitative, you know,—copied mostly after the English and American. They allow perfect freedom in such matters, simply because the Anglo-Saxons do. They are a nation of monkeys."

Hardy went back after his kodak.

"Neville seems to hate the Japanese," he mused, and the thought jarred, because he himself was most favorably impressed with the color, the apparent lightness and gaiety, the exquisite courtesy, the daintiness, the strangeness of this land which furnished him that new world and those new scenes that he so much needed.

"If one wants a new, a different view," he sighed, "Japan is the place to get it. I wish I could stay here. But then, beggars can't be choosers. I suppose Siberia will be as great a change from America as this place is."

The two men, as they walked away from the front steps of the Grand Hotel, presented, in their physical

appearance, as great a contrast as possible: Neville, tall, large-boned, florid, blue-eyed, thick-lipped; Hardy of medium size, dark, slender, well-knit, and so erect that he seemed to be slightly taller than he really was. His suit of dark gray fitted him with that unobtrusive elegance that proclaims the most expensive American tailors, while his gold-rimmed pince-nez added intellectual distinction to a high-bred, somewhat ascetic countenance.

“Did you ever see Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado*, well-staged?” he asked, after they had been out a couple of hours. “Well, that is Japan. It is a comic-opera country,—there is no better way of describing it. The only feature lacking in the Gilbert and Sullivan version is the babies. How they do swarm about the streets, all exactly like their elders, except that they are smaller! They do not impress one as babies. They seem rather a diminutive race of the same people, as though the Japanese had treated human beings as they sometimes do trees,—had dwarfed them by some artificial process.”

“Yes, they breed like rats,” replied Neville with a grim laugh.

In the afternoon they walked down toward the sea-shore, the Englishman still acting as guide.

“That would make a fine view,” suggested Ne-

ville, "those houses along the beach, that bit of sea, and the hills yonder."

"That is so," assented Hardy. "I believe I'll take it. If I'm not careful, I shall get all my films covered with babies." He opened his camera and rolled out the bellows. Then he strolled back and forth for several moments, gazing into the finder, as he tried to decide on the composition of the view that he would take. He pressed the bulb and was closing the instrument when a Japanese in European dress stepped up to him and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"You must give me that camera, sir," said the Japanese quietly, in perfect English. Hardy looked about in amazement. Naturally his first thought was that he was being robbed.

"Don't try anything of that kind here, my man," he replied, "or I'll give you into the hands of the police."

The threat was suggested by the presence of two police officers who were standing near, evidently watching the scene. The Japanese now called to them in his own tongue and they approached.

"I am an officer of the law," he said, "and you will be taken into custody if you resist. I beg that you will not compel me to have the camera taken

from you forcibly." Hardy rarely allowed himself to exhibit excitement.

"Better hand it to him," advised Neville. "He is evidently laboring under some mistake, which the authorities will be jolly well anxious to rectify when they find it out."

Hardy handed over his camera.

"I'll go with you to the police station," he said to the officer.

"Do not put yourself to the trouble," said the Japanese, "the police will know where to find you when they want you. The instrument will be returned to you, when we are through with it, at the Grand Hotel."

"Well, I call that cool!" said Hardy, as he stood watching the three men, who were walking off with his camera. "I'll have that instrument back if I have to stay here a month and make an international affair of it. I wonder what they wanted of it. What do you think?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Neville. "Probably they have heard that some other country prohibits taking photographs. As I told you, they are a nation of monkeys."

Mr. Hardy found his camera on his return to the hotel, with a note stating that the films would be re-

turned to him in the morning, developed. The incident, which had been conducted in a masterful manner, threw a new light on Japan. It led him to believe that this was something more than a comic-opera country, and that the inhabitants were not all babies.

CHAPTER II

SEARCHED BY THE POLICE

“The Anglo-Saxons are the only people who have any idea of personal liberty,” remarked Hardy, as the two men stood on the steps of the hotel, waiting for their jinrikisha to arrive. “Fancy the authorities in New York or London taking away your camera and developing the films, just to see what pictures you have taken! Well, I got my camera back all right, and I’m going to consider myself in luck because I get my films developed free of charge. I wonder if there’s anything else this obliging people would like to do for me before I go away?”

At this moment the jinrikisha came up and the newly-made friends started out for their night expedition about the streets of Yokohama,—such an excursion as only Pierre Loti or Lafcadio Hearn could describe adequately. An American’s chief sensation on first getting into a jinrikisha is loss of dignity. There you sit, perched in a narrow trim

baby carriage, driving a bare-legged little man with an inverted fish-basket on his head.

“It must take months of sojourn here to make one realize that this is a sober, bona fide mode of transportation,” Hardy remarked to his companion. “I suppose it’s as seriously regarded as the street-car or the hansom cab in our own countries. I must say, though, that I feel as if I were at Coney Island, riding about in a goat wagon for a lark.”

He glanced about sheepishly to see if anybody was looking at him, and was quite surprised to observe that nobody was paying the least attention in the world to him. Neville had lighted a cigar and was leaning luxuriously back with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. Hardy did not lean back. He was sure that if he did, the little man-horse would fly up into the air and oscillate at the end of his thills like a monkey on a stick.

They trotted from place to place till midnight or after, Hardy enjoying himself hugely. He took away with him a confused memory of dark, narrow streets swarming with Japanese, mostly babies; of occasional low buildings where something seemed to be going on inside; of steep acclivities at which it was necessary to get out and walk; and of steep declivities where the man-horse leaned back at an

angle of forty-five degrees and the muscles on his legs stood out in knots.

"I say," cried Hardy to Neville, "if this thing ever gets away from him I'll be in a pretty pickle."

"You'd travel to the bottom jolly fast!" laughed Neville, who did not seem to be the least bit nervous.

There were innumerable paper lanterns, of course, and one quarter of the town was lighted as if for a lawn party.

They were sitting on the floor in the back room of a tea-house, listening to the music furnished by three geishas, when they were arrested. Hardy had felt it a privilege to go into this place, because his companion assured him that it was the real thing, and not one of those resorts that are run for foreigners. This statement was borne out by the fact that the dozen or more patrons whom they found there were natives, with the exception of one, a little foreigner who spoke bad English, and who, as Hardy remembered afterward, sat offensively close to him. This man had a profuse, shapeless beard and bad teeth and persisted in drawing Hardy and Neville into conversation. The American took a dislike to him from the first.

"Don't resist, don't resist," whispered Neville, as four policemen stepped up to them. "It won't do

you the least good in the world, don't you know. They've made some blooming mistake, and when they find out what it is they'll do everything in their power to make amends."

"I haven't the least idea in the world of resisting," replied Hardy good-naturedly; "this is really interesting. Whom do they take us for, I wonder?"

They were escorted to a cab and whirled off to a large modern-appearing building of stone, whose front was lighted by an electric globe. They walked up a broad flight of stairs and entered a room, in the center of which a middle-aged Japanese, in the uniform of a general in the army, sat at a table writing. He was a corpulent man, in whose shrewd eyes and stern features European training contended with Mongol cunning. He spoke for a very few moments in a low tone with a subordinate, and, evidently as a result of this conference, Neville was led from the room. He returned after about twenty minutes and Hardy glanced at him curiously. If anything unpleasant had been done to him, it did not show in his face,—a fact which the American attributed to the other's British imperturbability.

Hardy himself was now led away. He was taken into a room about ten feet square, with bare floors and not an article of furniture. He found himself

alone with two Japanese, one of whom addressed him immediately in a language that he did not understand.

"I can not speak Japanese," he replied; "if you wish to talk with me, you will have to find some one who can speak English."

"I was not talking Japanese to you, as I think you know," replied his inquisitor, in absolutely perfect English. "You are too modest as to your really remarkable linguistic acquirements. But if it suits you to speak English at the present moment, I shall be most happy to oblige you. I am sorry to inform you that you must submit to being searched."

"Now, really, wouldn't that be carrying matters too far?" asked Hardy. "I had intended to take this thing good-naturedly, as it interests me; but searching me,—I really think I shall enter a protest against that. I am an American citizen, you know, and if any indignities are offered me, I shall not fail to demand redress."

"Unfortunately, we have nothing to do with that feature of the case," replied the Japanese. "We are under orders, and we trust you will not put us to the disagreeable necessity of using force."

"Well, go ahead," said Hardy cheerily, "and if you find anything out of the ordinary, I'll eat it."

They stepped briskly up to him and began to run their hands rapidly and deftly over his clothing and through his pockets. As they worked, he talked.

“If this had happened in Russia now, where every man is suspected of being an anarchist or a spy, I shouldn’t have wondered at it. But we Americans have begun to look on you Japanese as civilized people. We call you the Yank,—hello, what’s that?”

They had taken from his overcoat pocket a bundle of papers, which they opened under the electric bulb hanging from a wire in the middle of the room and began to examine. Hardy stepped forward briskly, out of curiosity, but one of them threw out an arm as rigid as a bar of steel and pushed him back as easily as if he were a child. As nearly as he could tell from the distance thus maintained, the paper seemed to be covered with drawings and plans of some kind.

“I never saw that before!” he exclaimed, much wondering. They went out together and left him in the middle of the room. Having nothing better to do, he lighted a cigarette and attempted to study it all out, standing there with his hands in his pockets.

“I only hope they don’t keep this farce up till I miss my train,” he mused; “I have bought my ticket.”

He was not kept waiting long. The general himself came in to see him.

"Of what am I accused?" asked Hardy, "and why am I subjected to these indignities?"

The general also spoke English. He had shrewd, fearless, penetrating eyes, and an absolutely dispassionate, businesslike air.

"You can not brazen the matter out," he replied. "The papers found on your person leave little doubt as to the nature of your mission in this country."

"I should like to see those papers," said Hardy. "I can not imagine what they are, that you should be interested in them. I didn't know that I had any papers in my overcoat pocket."

The general smiled.

"We shall be under the necessity of detaining you," he said, "and of examining you more at our leisure." He pushed a button in the wall. Two soldiers entered. "You will go with these men."

"But you are making some great mistake, that will get you all into trouble. I am a well-known American citizen, now on my way to Russia. I arrived only this morning, direct from my country. I demand to be taken before the American consul,—or, better, I will send for him."

"You say you arrived this morning?" asked the

general. Hardy's earnestness was so great that it was almost convincing. Besides, the Japanese had no desire to alienate American sympathy.

"Come out into my office and wait a while," he said; "I will telephone to your consul."

Hardy found Neville still waiting in the office, smoking a cigar and appearing quite cheerful, under the circumstances.

"Oh, this is good of you to wait for me," said the American, sitting down.

"Couldn't help it, my dear fellow," replied Neville. "They haven't let me go yet."

"But what do they suspect me of? What have I—what have we done? Have you any idea what those papers were that they found in my overcoat pocket?"

"Not the least in the world, but I suspect. You see, these people are simply spoiling for a fight with Russia. They talk and think of nothing else. Japan is a volcano of war, ready to erupt at any moment. Consequently, they are suspicious of foreigners. They probably take you for a Frenchman or a Russian,—a spy, in fact."

Neville spoke quite loud, so that it was possible for any of the officials standing near to hear him. Hardy admired his imperturbability. The consul soon arrived, a forceful man who understood his

business. Hardy produced his passport, a card, and several letters.

"I am on my way to Russia," he said, "to take a place with the American Trading Company at Stryensk. I have bought my ticket, and must get off in the morning."

The consul led him to one side.

"Those papers found on you are plans and specifications of the fortifications here," he whispered. "The authorities were rendered suspicious of you today through finding you in the act of photographing the harbor defenses. They have developed your films and they find a very good picture of the forts and the approach to them by sea."

Hardy laughed.

"I do seem to be a deep and dark villain, don't I? Yet, I assure you I was only taking an innocent view of the town."

"But how did you come by the plans and drawings?"

"I haven't the least idea in the world. I didn't even know there were any fortifications here."

"I believe you," said the consul. "Somebody, hard-pressed by the police, must have unloaded on you. What do you know about this—what's his name, who is with you? Where have you been?"

“This man with me? Why, he’s Neville, an Englishman. Everybody knows him and all about him. He’s a gentleman. We’ve been taking in the sights together in a jin—by Jove, I have it! In that place where we were arrested there was a most offensive chap who insisted on rubbing up against me. His face was covered with whiskers. He was a Russian, of course. He’s the man!”

The consul held a long conference with the general and the latter held one with his subordinates. As a result, the two men were allowed to go, the Japanese so overwhelming them with courtesy on their departure that Hardy, on the whole, was rather pleased than otherwise at his strange adventure.

“The bewhiskered gentlemen at the *café chantant*, or whatever you call it, was the man who put the papers in my pocket,” laughed Hardy to Neville, as he bade him good night at the Grand. “But why doesn’t he disguise himself? Anybody would know that he was a Russian with those whiskers. If there ever was a man who looked the part, he’s the one.”

“Perhaps the whiskers were artificial,” suggested Neville.

“Perhaps they were,” mused Hardy. And that, too, seemed probable.

CHAPTER III

THE QUEEN OF FAIRY-LAND

They were off for Aomori, at the north end of Nippon, in the early morning, leaving Yokohama on a toy train that started at six forty-five. All day they traveled through a country tilled like a garden, a country of vivid green, with many brawling streams of water clear as crystal, and hillsides thickly wooded. The sky was dark blue, reminding one of the excess of color used sometimes by impressionist artists, and seemed ever low and near. Objects evidently close by appeared far off, an effect sometimes attained in skilful landscape gardening, or perhaps in fairy-land. The frequent farm-houses were built of bamboo set on end, and were thatched with straw.

As they climbed into the mountains the streams became more numerous, with pebbly beds and clean high banks. Villages were frequent, and the hillsides were dotted with small houses in clumps of

trees. An occasional Buddhist temple was seen, as well as numerous tiny shrines to the Fox, the god of the rice-fields. The valleys were cut into square basins, flooded with water, and men and women in masculine attire were wading about in these, plying huge mattocks. These laborers wore straw hats shaped like inverted fish-baskets. Babies were still prevalent,—comical, fascinating little creatures, the girls distinguished from the boys by the obi, a sort of cushion fastened to the back, the universal mark of womanhood in Japan. In some cases it was an elaborate and beautifully embroidered affair, evidently a matter of pride; while, on the backs of many of the girls laboring in the rice-fields, it degenerated into a mere rag.

As Hardy and his companion gazed from the window, they were entertained by the running comment of their guide or dragoman, Masatsura Tsuchiya, whom they had picked up at Yokohama. This young Japanese had spent several years in New York, knew English, and was bright and officious to the verge of pertness.

When a Japanese merchant and a pretty young woman boarded the train about the middle of the day, it was Masatsura who acted as introducer and apologist.

"This is a Japanese silk merchant," he explained, "and he is going with his daughter to Hakodate. If the honorable gentlemen do not object, he will bring his daughter in with us. I have explained that such is the custom in England and America."

"Bring her in, of course," said Hardy, rising and making one of his most graceful bows. "We shall be delighted to have the lady's society." This was translated to Mr. Sano, the merchant, who executed a series of supple obeisances, and to the daughter, who arose and courtesied demurely in Japanese style.

"She's quite an acquisition, eh, Neville?" observed Hardy. "By the way,"—turning to Masatsura, "does either of them speak English?"

"Not a word," replied the guide.

"She's positively beautiful, don't you think so, Neville?" Hardy inquired of the Englishman.

"No," replied the latter, "I can't say that I do. There's something sickening in their beastly yellow skin to me; and those slits of eyes, pitched at that angle, strike me as deformed, or, as physicians would say, monstrous. All foreigners living in Japan regard the natives as an offensive, inferior lot, somewhat as your Southerners look on negroes. No, I can't get up any enthusiasm over your Jap girl's beauty."

"Well, to me she's about the daintiest and most exquisite creation my eyes ever rested on," persisted the American. "If there's any yellow in her cheeks, it's a slight tinge of moonlight, or, perhaps, one might fancy a little gold-dust mingled with the mortal clay of which she is made. She is as dainty as a March lilac blossom, her lips are as red as cherries, and the blood that shines through her cheeks, like—like firelight through a delicately-stained window—is as warmly red as if she were Anglo-Saxon. I can understand now how foreigners, like your own Edwin Arnold, for instance, have married Japanese women. Is it true that they do not kiss? Such lips as those were intended by an all-wise and merciful Providence for kissing."

"You'd jolly well change all those ideas after you'd been here a while," replied Neville. "You grow sick of yellow people after living with them. As far as I'm concerned, I'd as soon kiss a rat as a Japanese girl."

"Well," said Hardy, to whom the conversation was becoming distasteful, "it's not the thing to discuss a lady, even if we are in a foreign country and observing and discussing everything. I must insist, however, that I should weary of people like our little friend opposite, very slowly."

Hardy glanced at the girl as he said these words. She was looking past him out of the window, and a slightly uncomfortable feeling, that she must, by instinct, divine that they were talking about her, vanished from his mind. Her eyes, which were not black exactly, for black is a dead, lightless color, were fixed with interest on the moving panorama seen through the car window, and she seemed entirely oblivious of the other occupants of the compartment. Masatsura and Mr. Sano were at the other end all this time, volubly discussing some subject or other in their own tongue.

At the next station an official of the railroad company entered with hot water and tea leaves. He put some of the leaves into the pot standing on the table, in the center of the carriage, turned in the water and took his departure. After the tea had steeped a few moments, the girl poured it into cups and offered it to the men. Hardy decided that he had never seen a more modest and charming smile.

"Where does she get her exquisite breeding?" he asked Neville. "There's nothing exactly like it in our country. Our fashionable training-schools for girls would do well to bring over a few Japanese teachers."

"It isn't good manners," growled Neville, "it's

servility. Give her a dollar and she'll get down and bump her head on the floor—kotow to you."

An idea occurred to Hardy,—Neville was so disagreeable, he would talk to Miss Sano. He proposed the matter to Masatsura, who informed him that the young lady would be incredibly honored. Masatsura addressed a few words to her and she smiled on Hardy by way of assent and comprehension. He sat down by her, and Masatsura, standing before them, acted as interpreter. She was not the least embarrassed or silly. Her manner combined the most deferential interest with a quaint suggestion of roguishness. When they had finished drinking their tea, she fished up, from the depths of her voluminous pocket, a package of scented paper handkerchiefs, peeled one off and put the rest back. Then she wiped her lips with a few graceful dainty dabs, and poked the handkerchief out of the partly-opened window.

Hardy asked her where she lived, if she had any brothers and sisters, if she enjoyed dancing, and gradually got to comparing notes with her as to the life of young girls in Japan and in America. At his suggestion, Masatsura went out after something to eat at the next stop, and returned with some little boxes containing rice cooked to a paste, bits of

chicken and preserved lily root. A pair of chopsticks was tied to each box, and the girl, with much childish laughter, taught him to use them, clapping her little hands approvingly when he at last succeeded in conveying a morsel of food to his mouth.

By means of these chop-stick lessons, they arrived at a state of such mutual confidence that Hardy was able to dispense with the assistance of the guide. They got great amusement out of trying to make each other understand by means of signs. Hardy, for instance, wrote his name on a card and pronounced it several times, pointing to himself. She understood and made great difficulty of repeating his name. She succeeded at last, almost, and the strange words sounded so funny to her that she laughed merrily. When night came on, Aisome—Ah-e-so-me; so she was called—left the compartment for the women's quarters and Hardy and Neville lay down on the benches, which ran around the sides of the car like the seats in a Turkish house, instead of across it.

Before Aisome retired she served the tea again, of which Neville drank copiously, which, in Hardy's eyes, was another proof of his British extraction.

They all slept soundly, but the American was troubled with an unpleasant dream during the night.


"It amounted almost to a nightmare," he explained to Neville. "I thought that Aisome came in with two Japanese and they searched us as if we had been thieves. Aisome was still beautiful, but she did not look childish any more. I was positively afraid of her in my dream. The girl held the lantern and spoke once or twice, sharp and quick, as if giving commands. Her eyes were hard and eager, like those of a ferret. I could feel the man's hand running rapidly over my person, going into my pockets, crumpling up my shirt. They opened the valises, and even felt in our shoes. Then they all stole out again, closing the sliding door noiselessly."

"The Japs are all thieves," replied Neville. "Perhaps you were half-awake. We'd better look and see if anything has been taken."

The Englishman did not appear greatly perturbed, yet he went carefully through his pockets and his valise. Hardy followed his example, saying after he had finished:

"It was a dream right enough. Had it been anything else, I should have waked."

When Aisome came later with her father, Hardy told her of the dream, with Masatsura's aid as interpreter. She pursed up her pretty mouth and opened her eyes in wonder, commenting:



“That was a bad dream, but it is better to dream bad things than to have them really happen.”

Strangely enough, Aisome’s face, as he had seen it by night, kept haunting him, and the features of that apparition became confused with the sweeter and more innocent features at which he was now gazing.

“Was it a dream, after all,” he asked himself, “or was I partly waking?”

But he put the latter thought from him as preposterous.

CHAPTER IV

ONE FOND KISS

They all took dinner together, Aisome, Mr. Sano, Neville and Hardy, at the Aomori restaurant. Neville objected strenuously to this arrangement.

“They aren’t quite human, you know,” he said. “Englishmen think they lose caste when they dine with coolies, and so they don’t do it, don’t you know.”

“Well, we shan’t lose any caste by dining with this little woman,” replied Hardy warmly, “any more than if we were to dine with the Queen of Fairy-land. Personally, I shall feel honored to sit at the same table with so much grace and beauty. We shan’t need a bouquet with her there. Really, I consider her about as rare and exquisite a feminine creation as I have ever seen, and I shall think you mean to be disagreeable, if you do not show more respect for my feelings in the matter.”

“Oh, all right!” growled Neville; but he could not

help adding: "Most fellows feel as you do when they first come to this bally country."

The girl stood a little behind her father, with her hands lost in her voluminous sleeves as in a muff, and her eyes cast modestly down. As the men talked, she glanced up at them with the uncomprehending look of one who hears an unknown tongue. When the invitation to dine was explained to her, her eyes sought those of her father inquiringly. He nodded and smiled and she clapped her hands gaily.

Together they entered the lower room of the restaurant, which was simply a large barn-like compartment, floored with rough boards. At the foot of the stairway there were numerous pairs of slippers, of all shapes and sizes. Masatsura explained that they were requested to remove their shoes and select each a pair of slippers before ascending to the dining-rooms. Aisome and her father, of course, required no direction on this point. Hardy, as soon as he understood, sat down on the stair and commenced to take off his shoes. By good fortune, he found himself sitting side by side with Aisome. He had certainly, he thought, never seen anything so dainty as her little foot. In its yellow silk stocking, it reminded him of the petal of some flower. She had great difficulty in finding a slipper small enough,

and there was positively none large enough for Hardy, who managed, however, to stick his toes into a pair too small for him. He pointed to her feet and then to his own and measured off in the air two lengths, exaggerating the largeness of his own foot and the smallness of hers. She laughed and he experienced a feeling of comradeship with this tiny creature, with whom he could not talk a word, as if she were, in fact, "a good fellow."

They all started up the steps together, but Neville was detained. He had refused hotly to take off his shoes.

"But, sir, it is the custom of the country," explained Masatsura deferentially.

"I didn't come over here to learn their blooming manners," replied Neville; "I brought mine with me."

"Better take 'em off, old man," protested Hardy, who was trying to be civil, but had begun to weary of his companion. "They may think it positively indecent to go into a dining-room with shoes on."

After some opposition, on the ground that it made him feel like a fool to go about in his stocking feet, Neville removed his shoes and started up the stairs with them in his hand.

"Better bring your shoes, too," he explained to

Hardy. "They'll probably steal them if you leave them down here."

They all squatted about a low table, whose legs were not over a foot high, and waited for dinner. Their room, which had been enlarged to suit the size of the party by simply sliding together a partition, looked out on a court. Diners in other rooms on the opposite side of the court could be seen, also squatting about tables. In less than five minutes Hardy had become most uncomfortable, but Aisome and her father sat there on their toes as easily as if they were reclining on couches. They ordered of the pretty girl who came to serve them, and waited perhaps fifteen minutes, when Neville exclaimed: "Where are my shoes?" in such a tone that Aisome looked up inquiringly, and her father evidently asked Masatsura what the trouble was.

"The waiter took them out to have them blacked," explained the guide. "She will either bring them back or else leave them down there with the others."

It was necessary to hurry through dinner somewhat, for the *Teijo Maru* sailed at three.

Neville spoke about his shoes two or three times, insistently, and they were brought back to him in a few moments. He kept them thereafter close at his side, his eyes on them.

When the two foreigners left for the boat, Hardy made a pretty parting speech to Aisome, which Masatsura translated.

At the wharf he was arrested again. He was thoroughly disgusted and threatened to make trouble, but, to tell the truth, his rage was somewhat mollified by the fact that he might see Aisome again, and that he would not be compelled to pass a week or so longer in the Englishman's company. Nevertheless, he said to him on parting: "If this thing keeps on, I shall begin to share your opinion of the Japanese."

Hardy was clapped into a room overlooking the sea, from the window of which he could see the *Teijo Maru* steaming out into the purple distance. An elaborate and dainty dinner was brought to him in the evening, and about ten that night he was escorted to the wharf again. A tiny figure, muffled in a cloak, was waiting there, and the others stepped aside as this person approached.

"I hope you are not vexed with me," said a familiar voice in the well-modulated accents of an educated woman.

"Aisome!" cried Hardy.

"Yes, Aisome."

"But—but—you speak English."

"Yes, I am a graduate of Vassar College and now in the service of my country. Listen—I have only a moment and I feel that I would like to make you an explanation. Your companion was a Russian spy. The plans of the forts, on oiled paper, were found between the soles of his right shoe. It was he, no doubt, who put the copy of them in your pocket, having learned that he was under suspicion and would soon be arrested. It was he, I am sure, who entrapped you into taking a photograph of the forts. You are under suspicion and would have been in terrible danger, had you gone with him. You will sail, now, on another ship and will be safe."

"He will be in danger!" said Hardy, mystified. "What sort of danger?"

"Did I say that he would be in danger?" asked Aisome sweetly. "No, I said that you would have been in danger. We have taken the plans of the forts away from him, but he still has them in his head—and—and—perhaps you have, but I do not think so—a man who could speak so beautifully of a woman."

"But why are you doing all this for me?" asked Hardy.

"Why? Because I am a woman, I suppose. Because you have said there is moonlight in my cheeks,

that my lips are ripe cherries, that I am made of gold-dust, that I am a Queen of Fairy-land. I am known as 'the Fox,' but I have a woman's silly heart and can not resist flattery." There was something elfin-like in her beauty as she stood there with her face raised to his in the moonlight. "Old Sano says my head is turned," she sighed, "but it is easy to wheedle him."

"Sano? He is not your father then?"

"No, he is my superior in the secret service. And now good-by; you—you may kiss me once, if you really meant what you said. It will be the only kiss of my life, as it is not the custom of my country."

She raised her lips to him and he stooped and kissed her. The lips were dewy and very sweet, and he was conscious of some subtle perfume, as if she herself were some exquisite flower.

"Good-by," she whispered, "and think sometimes of the little Lilac Blossom!"

She turned and was gone, and he stepped into the boat waiting to take him out to the ship.

CHAPTER V

AT THE MERCY OF THE WAVES

The crew of the *Shikoku Maru* consisted of five persons: the captain, the engineer and three sailors. They were the first filthy, unkempt Japanese that Hardy had seen. One of them, a shock-headed boy, who seemed to have brought to sea with him all the smells of Chinatown, came and stood by the American's side and gazed into his face with insatiable, devouring curiosity. Hardy was watching the twinkling lights of the town and thinking of Aisome, with whom he had been thrown so brief a time, yet who had played such a large part in his life and left such an indelible impression on his memory. Yes, he had known her but two days, yet he would carry away a more vivid recollection of her than of many other people with whom he had been associated for years. He wondered if she were really in love with him, or only touched by the compliments he had paid her, which, under the circumstances, she could not help knowing were sincere.

"Women are the same the world over," he soliloquized, "they like flattery. Different races are distinguished by yellow and red and white and black skins, but there are no race characteristics to mark the feminine heart. Yet, when I say 'flattery' I am perhaps doing an injustice, for it was the evident sincerity of the compliments I paid her which made such an impression on Aisome."

The light grew dimmer. He was, indeed, leaving behind the teeming millions of Japan, with its hates and its loves, its traditions, its policy, its statesmen, its noblemen and its beggars, its sorrows and its joys, its hopes and its heartaches. He took a deep breath of the sea wind and sighed.

"Old Emery was right," he mused, "the thing for me to do was to get away and begin again. One's own grief seems small when he sees how big the world is, when he comes to realize that his particular ache is only a drop in the great ocean of human misery. I shall probably never in my life meet another person who has heard of Margaret Manners, and her—her fickleness."

He called her Margaret Manners, though the thought that she was even now Margaret Sunderland gave him a wrench.

But he had already reached the stage when one

realizes that one is grieving after something that has never existed: in this case it was the idealized, not the actual, Margaret, and he was therefore far on the road toward forgetfulness and recovery. He felt uncomfortable now and noticed that the Japanese boy was still standing by his side, staring at him. He wanted to be alone.

"Go 'way," he said, "take yourself off!" The boy did not move. Hardy pointed and made a gesture that could not be misunderstood. The boy retreated a step and scowled angrily. Hardy seized him by the shoulder and gave him a push.

"Get on about your business!" he commanded. "You annoy me."

The boy's fists doubled and his lips flew back from his teeth. He took a step forward threateningly and looked the American impudently in the eye. Then, muttering angrily, he turned and walked away rapidly.

"They're a spunky race, if they are all like that fellow," thought Hardy. "Perhaps, if I had remained longer in Japan, I should have amended my first impressions of the country. They are spoiling for a war with Russia, eh? Well, Russia will eat them up and it's a pity, for they are certainly the most picturesque people on the face of the globe."

The lights grew fewer, fading in the distance one by one.

"It might be as well," mused Hardy, "to make myself as agreeable as possible to these Japs. I am alone with them in the middle of the sea, and I heard rumors in Yokohama that, despite their exquisite politeness, they hate all Caucasians. Perhaps Aisome,—but no, she certainly was sincere. I wonder where Neville is now?" The American felt in his hip pocket and was comforted by the cold touch of his revolver-handle. The reflection that he was one of the most famous amateur shots in America gave him a distinct feeling of security. He was conscious of a sense of danger, he could not tell why, which he could not quite satisfy by the reflection that such a feeling was natural to a man situated as he found himself at the present moment.

The lights were all gone now. That one yonder, at which he had been gazing so long and which did not fade, was a star, he was quite sure. He turned and walked forward to where the captain was talking with one of the sailors, and indicated, by laying his cheek on his open palm, that he was sleepy and would like to go to bed. The captain, with sudden comprehension and many exaggerated gestures of politeness, led him to a hatch and raised the door.

Hardy saw a ladder and as much of the dark, roomy hold as a lantern hanging from a beam could illuminate. The captain went down the ladder and Hardy followed. Had he been able to speak Japanese, or to make himself in any way understood, he would have objected to sleeping below, would have explained that he preferred to wrap himself in a blanket and remain on deck where the air was purer. But he remembered his experience with the boy, and did not think it best further to antagonize these men, in whose power he so completely was.

The captain took down the lantern and opened the door. The cabin into which he led the way was nearly semicircular in shape, as it was bounded by a partition across the hull and the walls of the ship's stern. A cushioned divan extended in a semicircle around the rear end, there was a carpet on the floor and furniture in the form of a table over which was swung a dining rack, and a couple of chairs. The captain made an inclusive, hospitable gesture, accompanied by a low salaam. Hardy's mind was relieved.

"They evidently think they are giving me the best they have," he concluded. "I was a little rough with the boy up there, but I never could endure being stared at."

He regretted now his fleeting distrust of Aisome, whose dewy kiss and faint, flower-like fragrance lingered with him as a memory of exquisite daintiness.

The captain said something that sounded like "*Yukkuri*," closed the door and was gone.

"I'm not going to be very comfortable here," thought Hardy, as he sat down on the upholstered divan. He was directly over the screw, which shook the little vessel at this point as though it would shake it into pieces. The stern, too, had an unpleasant way of rising out of the water, causing him for the moment to feel as though he were dropping from a far height. He took considerable pride in the fact that he was not seasick.

"I—I've done too much sailing on my own yacht to let a little thing like this knock me out," he muttered, "but I'd like to see Johnny Farjeon here!"

Farjeon's extraordinary capacity for seasickness had always been a source of amusement to Hardy.

The divan looked comfortable, so he lay down on it and composed himself for sleep. He woke up about an hour later on the floor. The wind was rising and the increased plunging of the boat had rolled him from his couch.

He spread his blankets on the floor and lay down

on them, where he soon became aware, as he was now thoroughly awake, that the cabin was filled with a sickening odor, reminding him, as had the proximity of the curious boy above, of the smells of Chinatown. The stern of the ship was going up and down like a child's see-saw, only it attained prodigious heights and depths. When it arose out of the water the screw whirred viciously and vainly in the air, shaking the cabin as a terrier shakes a rat. Hardy remembered that this was an emigrant ship, used for carrying Japanese and Korean laborers across to Russia. The hold, he had noticed by the light cast by the lantern, was fitted up with rows and rows of wooden bunks, placed one above the other.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, "that horrible smell oozes in through the partition. Such an odor would make me sick on solid land."

He had too much pride in his seamanship to admit that the motion had anything to do with his nausea.

"I must have air," he muttered, "fresh air."

There was a port-hole on either side of the cabin, and he scrambled up to one of these; with considerable difficulty he managed to turn the screw and to throw open the circular glass window. The sweet

breath of the sea immediately came whistling in, and he held his face for some minutes to the window, taking long, deep drafts of it. The moon was shining and he could see a vast expanse of tumbled waters, black as ink. One moment he was looking at them from an apparently great height, and the next the long swash of the waves washed the side of the hull but a foot or two below the port-hole. He climbed down.

“That has blown the smell out of here already,” he muttered. “I’ll warrant this place hasn’t been ventilated before in years. Now for some sleep.”

He lay down again on the blankets and soon dozed off. He was awakened a second time by a cold stream of water, spouting full upon him with terrible force. He jumped to his feet, only to be thrown sprawling. The little vessel, which was light, was rolling from rail to rail, and the water had coughed in through the opened port-hole. A sudden fear that the ship would founder and that he would be drowned, cooped up there in the cabin, seized him and he leaped, clambering, for the port-hole. It was not far above him, but ere he could reach it, it was below him and he was thrown toward it, receiving a second water spout full in the face, drenching him to the skin. But he was as active

as a monkey and succeeded in thrusting an arm through the opening. He hung on with a will, and as his side of the vessel hove into the air again, he slammed the window to and gave a few frantic whirls to the screw, sufficient to make it catch and form a solid object to which he could hold. He secured the window and rolled to the floor, where he rested on hands and knees, with his limbs spread out as widely as possible to keep himself from rolling about, while he took stock of the situation. Enough water had come in to drench him thoroughly and to wet his blankets and baggage, but not sufficient to flood the floor of the hold.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "That was a narrow escape. I might very easily have sunk the ship that way! I closed that port-hole in the nick of time."

He concluded, as it was no longer practicable to have fresh air, to go above. Now that the port-hole was closed, the sickening odor from the emigrants' quarters immediately made itself manifest.

"There isn't wind enough in heaven to blow that smell away for good," concluded Hardy.

He crawled to the door and tried to open it, but, to his surprise, found it locked. He pounded on it and shouted, but to no avail. This discovery aroused in him again the sense of danger, and the

face of Aisome, as he had seen it in his dream in the train, took shape before the eyes of his memory. Seizing the knob of the door, he threw his entire weight against it several times, with the intention of breaking it in, but, to his surprise, it offered unexpected resistance. As he stood thus, still holding to the knob and wondering why he had been made a prisoner, there was a horrible grinding, grating sound; the ship shuddered as though wounded to the death, and the stern rose high in the air and remained thus. Hardy knew this from the fact that he was now almost lying on the door, against which, a moment ago, he had been leaning. The grinding continued, accompanied by bumps and slidings, giving him very much the same sensation that he had once experienced in a building that was being shaken by an earthquake. The waves, over which she had but now been leaping with long free strides, pounded against her with terrific and angry violence.

“My God!” gasped Hardy, “we have run upon a rock and I shall be drowned here like a rat in a hole, if they do not let me out! Open this door! Hello! Open, I say!”

CHAPTER VI

A TERRIBLE HOUR

The ship had evidently ridden partly over the rock or reef upon which it was perched and was resting at an angle with nose downward. This was fortunate, because it precluded any immediate danger of drowning. Hardy's position was uncomfortable in that there was not a level surface in the entire room for him to rest on. Man, inferior in this respect to a cat or a fly or a worm, becomes next to helpless when his standing-ground is tilted.

He can climb a mountain, it is true, but even the crevices into which he digs his toes are tiny plateaus, by which he mounts from one to the next above. Let but one step be missing and he can go no farther up his mountain. Here was Hardy, tumbled like a bag of wheat into the angle formed by the tilted floor and the wall. The table was screwed to the floor and, by throwing himself lengthwise and extending his arms, he could grasp one leg.



n this door! Hello! Open, I say!" Page 49

He pulled himself to the table and, holding to one of its legs, sat in the middle of the floor and thought and listened. The ability to think in a trying situation, the attempt to make mind superior to matter, is the surest evidence of courage. That he could not beat in the door with his feet or by throwing his body against it, he had already learned, and it now became evident to him that there was little to be gained by shouting. The Japanese who had locked him there would not be likely to come to his assistance, even if they could hear him. They would have their own skins to look after, and, besides, had their intentions been friendly, they would not have imprisoned him. No, he was the victim of treachery; he was in the hands of men who regarded him as a spy and who had been instructed to dispose of him. The malignancy of the boy was now explained. He thought of Aisome and muttered, "If I get out of this, I will never trust another woman as long as I live."

Moreover, shouting would have done small good, had he been on his own yacht. The wind was humming without, with the low, slow moan of the open sea, pitched on the note of a bumblebee, yet suggestive of loneliness, vastness and solitude. The pounding of the waves, the hissing and splashing of

the waters, the creaking of timbers, the rattling of things falling and tumbling about, made a din through which no human voice could have hoped to penetrate. Every moment some great wave put its shoulder under the stern and lifted it a trifle, at which the ship would lurch forward with that dreadful grating, which now could be felt rather than heard.

“She will soon pound to pieces,” thought Hardy, who well knew the power of the waves; “she can’t live long in this sea.” He was conscious in every molecule of his brain and every fiber of his being that he wanted to live and have another try at life. All the ennui, the disgust, the supposed disillusionment, were gone when they were now put to the test.

“If she smashes up,” he reflected, “I shall have no more chance than a chicken in an egg that is hit with a hammer. But she may not go to pieces immediately. Ships have been known to hang on for days.”

Every time she lurched he was thrown so violently forward that it required all his strength to hold on to the table leg. He must have remained in this position for an hour, an eternity it seemed to him,—of mingled fear and hope, for the fact that the

vessel did not immediately go to pieces, led him to entertain the cheerful idea that perhaps she would hold out. He remembered a wreck off the coast of Massachusetts that had remained for months on the rocks, defying wind and waves.

There was at last a more violent upheaval than any before. The ship plunged and settled, leaving the cabin floor nearly level. Hardy sprang to his feet.

"She has either broken her back," he cried, "or she has gone over the reef and settled in the shallows!"

She listed to port and rocked gently from side to side, rendering it impossible for him to stand without holding to something. And now the water, which had been pouring into the forward part of the hold, came seething from beneath and around the door and through the cracks of the partition. Every time the ship listed to starboard, it reached a tiny knot-hole and spouted for several feet in a hissing stream.

"She has settled on the bottom," muttered Hardy; "she will hold now, she will hold! The water can't possibly rise high enough to drown me. I will climb on the table, on the divan."

It rose to his ankles, to his knees,—and he got

upon the table, and sat there holding to the edges. The wind began to subside somewhat, and he could hear the ghostly, unearthly noises made by the wreck itself; moanings and groanings, creakings, knockings, mutterings, whisperings, the gurgle and seething of the water as it rushed in and out with the rhythmical listing of the ship.

At last the gray of early dawn began to peep in at the port-holes, and he could see that they were high and dry above the level of the ocean. Four rats were swimming about in the cabin, their be-whiskered noses thrust above the water, a look of fright and comradeship almost human in their twinkling little eyes. They made triangular wakes, as they circled about the table and looked up at him. Once, when a considerable area of the divan rose clear, through a greater list than usual, one of them started for the spot, quickly followed by the others, side by side. They all scrambled up and huddled together, but were soon washed off, when the ship pitched again to starboard.

Hardy got down from the table and waded over toward the port-hole. The rats swam to him and he looked about for something with which to beat them off, as he remembered that rats, when cornered, will attack a man. But these had no intention of biting,

though they came so close that they even bumped their noses against his legs.

He climbed to the port-hole, opened it and looked out. The early sun was gleaming redly on a sullen heaving sea. The waves were whitening over a long reef. Perhaps, if he could procure something in the shape of a stick or pole that he could poke out of the window, with his shirt tied to it—he looked about, and, to his surprise discovered that the door was partly open. He jumped down and waded to it, thinking for the moment that the Japanese had come to release him. He pushed the door open and gazed into the dim hold, where mattresses and planks from the berths were floating about in rather dangerous confusion.

He gained the ladder, mounted and stood upon the deck; there was no sign of a living soul. Evidently the Japanese had gone off and left him to his fate. The door, he had no doubt, had been jammed open by the straining and plunging of the ship. There was land in the distance, a faint coast-line, which he knew could not be that of Russia, for the *Shikoku Maru* had been out only a few hours when she struck. Hardy remained on the wreck till nearly noon. He had about made up his mind, should the crew return, to let them get aboard, pick them off

with his revolver and take to the sea with their boat, when he discovered a steamer approaching. He signaled her and she sent a small boat that took him and his baggage off. She was a Russian steamer, bound for Vladivostok.

CHAPTER VII

NEVILLE IN A NEW GUISE

The *Teijo Maru*, on which Stapleton Neville had started, as he supposed for Vladivostok, was a somewhat larger ship than the *Shikoku Maru*. She was cleaner, and the crew, which contained several more men, were more careful of their personal appearance. In every way the vessel gave evidence of being under more efficient management than the other. The truth is, of course, that she had been subsidized by the Japanese government.

Neville, as we know, got away about three o'clock in the afternoon. He passed the first two hours of his journey reclining easily on the deck in a steamer chair, watching the hills of Japan, wreathed in a blue mist, sink slowly into the bluer sea.

He was in a happy frame of mind, was Boris Romanoff, alias Stapleton Neville. His cigar was excellent, and he was cheered by the reflection that he had successfully carried through an extremely

shrewd bit of business. He chuckled now as he thought of it. He could tell the emperor, for instance, that the Japanese were actually going to fight. The entire people were united to a man, to a woman, to a baby, in hatred of Russia; the spirit of the nation was heated to the boiling-point, ready to bubble over and overflow at any moment. Nothing but war was talked of in the tea-houses, on the streets. It would be difficult to pacify this mad populace, bent on its own destruction, should the rulers wish to do so. But there was evidently no intention of pacifying it. Preparations for a stern conflict were going on rapidly, steadily: in the drilling and arming of troops, the amassing of stores and ammunitions, the fitting out of battle-ships, the strengthening of fortifications. Those who had the fate of the nation in charge manifestly shared the popular opinion that self-preservation demanded a death grapple with its neighbor, Russia. The old samurai spirit was aroused and dominated the entire nation—the spirit that glories in death on the battlefield or even in *hara-kiri*, that dishonor may be wiped out. "*Banzai! Banzai!*" The dandies in the tea-houses, the merchants at their counters, the laborers in the rice-fields, the harlots in their iron cages, were all muttering, "*Banzai! Banzai!*"

Romanoff would advise that serious preparations be made to meet this coming onslaught, which could no longer be avoided by empty promises, nor be put off by diplomacy. The Japanese would actually fight. They would even attack with large and fanatic armies, well equipped, and with modern battle-ships, efficiently managed. Romanoff had got out of the country with much valuable information, and with plans of various fortifications and the location of batteries, safely, as he thought, nailed between the soles of his shoes.

"It was a tight squeeze there at the end," he chuckled, lighting another excellent cigar, "but my amiable American friend helped me out just at the critical moment. Oh, well! He won't take it so hard. He can amuse himself with the coolie maiden who made such an impression on his susceptible heart. He will probably thank me for leaving him in her society."

Over toward Russia the sun was setting, a disk of two shades of red that divided it exactly in halves, vermilion above and carmine below. He was not generally appreciative of the charms of nature, but this sight was so oddly beautiful, and he was so contented with himself, that he sat gazing at it for some time and actually enjoying it. As he looked,

the carmine crept slowly upward, covering the vermilion, until at last the entire orb was of the latter color; and so well-timed was the spectacle, as though it were being managed by some great scientific artist for the delectation of invisible spectators, that the disk sank into the deep blue of the sea and disappeared just at the moment when the transformation was complete.

And now the curtain of night was falling. Romanoff gazed about him; he looked toward Japan to see if that hated country had faded into twilight and distance. To his surprise, the coast seemed even nearer than when he had last turned his eyes toward it. The vessel was evidently heading northward, along the shores of Ezo.

“Now what can this mean?” he asked himself. “It isn’t possible that they have mistaken their course. The scoundrels know these waters too well. Maybe they are going to touch at some port up here before going across. Well, it will only make a difference of half a day or so. I suppose I’ll have to stand it. Even two or three days will not make any particular difference to me.”

He lighted a third cigar and settled back, determined to accept the situation with stolid Russian patience. But, somehow, as he sat and smoked, a

faint suspicion took shape in his mind, that grew stronger till it resulted in uneasiness.

"Can there be any trickery here?" he reasoned. "I believe I'll speak to the captain—a few words of very bad Japanese—and pretend that I can hardly understand what he answers."

He arose and started forward to carry out this resolve, but stopped and reflected, leaning over the rail.

"It may be much to my advantage," he concluded, "to let them think that I do not understand their jargon at all. Perhaps, by listening, I may learn the truth. They are all liars."

He strolled forward to where the mate and one other, evidently not a member of the crew, were conversing. He passed quite close, and they lowered their voices.

"Be careful," he heard the mate say; "he may understand Japanese."

"Not a word," replied the other, "not a word. He has never been heard to utter more than two or three words of our tongue, and those only such as all foreigners learn. Even those were horribly mispronounced."

Romanoff leaned against the rail again and gazed down into the water.

"Oh, well," said the mate, "it wouldn't make much difference if he did overhear us. He couldn't do anything to help himself. But probably you are right. He could not have learned Japanese in the few months he has been in this country."

"I am sorry," said the other, "that war is not actually in progress, that he might have been hanged, and good riddance to him, the vermin! That's the proper thing to do with a spy; put a rope about his neck and jerk him up. How do you suppose the devils of Russians would treat a Japanese spy, caught in their country?"

"They would give him short shrift," replied the captain. "Yet you must not forget that we are going to show the world that we are a civilized nation, while Russia is not. After all, there are worse things than death. Being locked up in a dungeon, with no communication with the civilized world for months, perhaps years, is not the pleasantest thing in the world."

"Years!" said the other. "He will be released as soon as the war is over, and the victorious armies of the mikado will be in St. Petersburg within six months. Why not pitch him overboard to-night and say that he jumped and tried to swim ashore, or that he was washed from the deck and drowned?"

The devil might escape, you know. 'Twould be a patriotic act to rid the earth of him."

Romanoff's cigar had gone out. He walked up to the men and by gestures indicated that he would like a match.

"You are right," said the mate, scratching a match and lighting the Russian's cigar with much show of politeness. "The stupid pig doesn't know a word of our tongue."

Romanoff returned to his chair. It required all of his self-control to maintain his air of indifference. He glanced furtively about and felt in his inside coat pocket, where he grasped the handle of a sheath-knife, his only weapon. He was a great believer in the knife at close quarters. It made no noise and it never missed fire. He had purposely avoided the carrying of a revolver in Japan, as he knew that the firing of one, in case of a row, would have brought the police down on him immediately. What should he do now?

"If they try to throw me overboard," he decided, "there'll be two or three dead Japanese before I go. It's possible that this secret-service man knows the jiu-jitsu. I'll get about six inches of cold steel into him before he has a chance to try any of his monkey tricks. If they take me off in a boat, it is not likely

that more than two or three of them will come along. But they will probably be armed with revolvers."

He cast a glance at the shore and studied the distance critically. By the light of the rising moon, it did not seem more than two miles off. Besides, between there and the ship there were several tiny islands, mere projecting rocks, where a man might rest. He was consumed with rage, and, strangely enough, his hate turned on Hardy, whom he had not victimized, after all.

"These vermin know their friends," he muttered. "Doubtless even now that little dandy and his courtesan are laughing at me. If I had him in Holy Russia, I would have fun with him."

He glanced again at the shore. They would soon be passing an island or a projecting rock not more than half a mile distant. Something that the two Japanese said had put an idea into Romanoff's head—caused him to take a sudden resolve. He was sitting in the narrow passageway between the cabins and the rail, and there was no one in sight. He quickly cut his handkerchief into strips and made a string. Then he sliced off the sole of his right shoe and tied it about his neck, dropping it inside his undershirt. He secured his knife in the same way, sheath and all. A moment later he had divested him-

self of his clothing, with the exception of his undergarments. Making the sign of the cross, and praying, "Mother of Christ, into thy hands I commit myself," he dropped over the side, feet on.

He scarcely made a ripple. When he came up and shook his head clear of water, the black hull of the ship was already several yards distant, moving rapidly away. Her churning wake troubled him for an instant and he swallowed a little sea-water.

But he filled his lungs with the joy of a perfect swimmer and rolled far over on his right side. Dipping his cheek beneath the water, he took four long, easy strokes. Raising his head, he blew like a porpoise, and filled his lungs again. His powerful left arm, curved like a hook, rose and fell noiselessly and pulled him through the sea.

CHAPTER VIII

ROMANOFF INVOKES THE SAINTS

The distance was greater than Romanoff supposed, and long ere he reached the rock he began to feel weary. He did not allow the strength of his arms to become entirely exhausted, but turned over on his back occasionally and rested. Had he lost his head and wasted his powers in violent struggles, he would soon have drowned. Coolness and courage and the sternness of his purpose saved him, and he at last came to the sheer edge of a cliff, shining white in the rays of the moon. He swam around it and on the shoreward side found a sloping projection, upon which he climbed and lay down, thoroughly exhausted, after a noble swim of two miles. The night was warm and he did not feel cold. He must have fallen into a doze and slept for about an hour, when he awoke with a start to see a Japanese, whom he recognized as one of the sailors of the *Teijo Maru*, standing over him with a revolver pointed at his

head, while another was beaching the prow of a dory. He sprang erect, every faculty on the alert, and fumbled for his knife.

"Stop!" commanded the Japanese, "make but the least move and I'll shoot."

"I seem to be in your power again, curse you!" said Romanoff, noticing with satisfaction that his adversaries were but two. "What do you want me to do?"

"Ah, he speaks Japanese like a native!" cried the mate, for it was none other. "You will come with us, of course, and I warn you again that the slightest suspicious move will result in your instant death."

"I will come," replied Romanoff, "since there is nothing else for me to do."

He stepped down to the dory and took a seat in the stern, the mate sitting beside him. The other Japanese shoved off, seized the oars and headed for shore, about half a mile distant.

"May I ask what you are going to do with me?" asked Romanoff. "You will readily understand that my curiosity is natural. Now is an opportunity to display that politeness for which your nation is so famous, and which, up to the present time, I have failed to experience or observe."

"We are going to take you on shore and lock you up in a dungeon, where you will be kept until the victorious armies of the mikado enter St. Petersburg."

"Life imprisonment, eh? But you are most merciful, without intending to be, for three months after you little madmen have declared war on Holy Russia, Japan will be a province of the czar and I shall be set free. I shall ask, as a special reward for my services, that you two be given fifty blows of the knout each and set to work in chains breaking rock on my estate near Moscow."

"For that speech," said the mate, "I am going to bind your hands, that you may give us less trouble on shore. I had it in my mind to kill you, as your ugly disposition gives every excuse for doing, but I think I will let you live to witness the degradation of your country. Nomura, hand me that rope in the prow and get your revolver ready to shoot him if he resists."

"Here is the rope," said Nomura. The mate leaned forward a trifle to take it, but that careless move cost him his life, for Romanoff jerked his knife from his shirt and plunged it to the hilt beneath the mate's arm. An instant later he set his foot against the side of the little craft, and, throw-

ing the whole weight of his body into the effort, upset the dory. As he plunged beneath the waves, Nomura's revolver exploded vainly in the air. Romanoff swam a little distance away, when another shot rang out and he was stung by the impact of the bullet, that struck the water above his body and glanced humming off into the night. He looked back at the overturned boat and saw that his enemy was clinging to it.

"He can't swim," he reflected, "or he would hardly hang on there. I may as well strike out for shore. He'll be almost sure to drown."

Putting the knife between his teeth, he took several strokes, when the Jap shot again, missing his head by an inch or two.

"He's a cool beast, for one in his fix," thought Romanoff, grabbing the knife and diving. "He is taking deliberate aim, but can hardly hit me in this light with the boat pitching like that."

He came up again at a greater distance and again the Jap shot, missing by several feet.

"Four!" said Romanoff grimly; "there is only one cartridge in his revolver. If he misses with that one, he will be at my mercy. Then I'll see what can be done with him."

Rolling over on his back, he floated, with but his

nose above the water. Occasionally he splashed a little with feet or hands, to tempt the Jap to shoot. Several minutes passed thus, when Romanoff heard a slight rippling sound, and looking, he saw a dark object approaching him rapidly through the water. It was the head of the Japanese.

"He can swim, after all!" gasped Romanoff, and he struck out for the shore. It was a race for life, for if the Japanese were allowed too near he would be able to hit the Russian. But the race did not last long, for Nomura was but an ordinary swimmer, while Romanoff was one of those men who take as naturally to the water as a Newfoundland dog. Another shot rang out, and he turned leisurely about and looked. He had increased the distance from his adversary, who was now trying to regain the overturned boat, which, floating toward the shore, had come nearer to him. He succeeded, and, throwing his arms over it, waited. Romanoff came up to the other side, and, resting on it, the two men gazed into each other's eyes.

"You are about to die, Mr. Nomura," said Romanoff with a smile.

"I ask no mercy from a pig," replied Nomura, spitting on him. "My death will be avenged a thousand times on you and yours."

"I shall rest here a while before I kill you," said Romanoff, "if you will kindly share your support with me. You have learned a valuable lesson in warfare, namely, that the knife is a surer weapon at close quarters than the revolver. It is a pity that learning this lesson by experience prevents your making use of it."

"My countrymen will hold the feast of lanterns in Moscow and Petersburg," said Nomura in even tones of defiance, "and they will make geishas of your harlot sisters, and your harlot mother will serve them with *saké*."

Romanoff slashed at one of his hands with the knife, but Nomura was too quick for him, and jerked the hand away.

"Take my dying curse," he said, "my ancestors wait for me,"—and slipped beneath the water. Romanoff waited a few minutes to see if the Japanese would appear again, and then swam leisurely to shore. The only building at the exact spot of his landing was a white Shinto temple, roofed with thatch, but at some distance, on a sloping hillside, was a small fisher-village. As before, Romanoff lay down to rest.

"Here I am," he reflected, "a Russian in a suit of underclothes. The ship will probably send in an-

other boat to find out what has become of the first one, and a hue and cry will be raised against me. I must decide on some course of action. I rely on the aid of Saint Nicholas and the Virgin, who have been with me thus far.”

CHAPTER IX

ADRIFT

Romanoff's first thought was to steal down to the village under cover of darkness, appropriate the first available boat he could get hold of, and put to sea. If he could obtain any sort of small craft carrying sail—and this would not be difficult—he had little doubt that he would be able to make the distance across to Vladivostok, about three hundred miles. A favoring wind would be provided by his patron saint, to whom he would erect a shrine and before whose icon he would keep a light burning perpetually. He ought to have a little food and some water, for it is not pleasant to be becalmed in the ocean without water; but perhaps even these would be possible. Things go very smoothly when one's saint is propitious. His greatest danger lay in the likelihood that the *Teijo Maru* was hovering in the offing.

“But even so,” he reflected, “I seem to have made

a very mysterious disappearance. If I am not seen here on shore, the captain will take for granted that something happened to the dory and that we were all three drowned. If I steal a sail-boat, that will cause suspicion and they will take after me. But, with this breeze, I should be far away before daylight."

It was beginning to blow. The storm was springing up which had nearly swamped Courtland Hardy in his cabin and had driven the *Shikoku* upon a rock.

Romanoff was very tired. He had called on the reserves of his youth—perfect health and great strength—and well-nigh exhausted them. He was strongly tempted to lie there in the warm sand, fanned by the sweet lulling breeze, and sleep till morning. He yawned and nearly dozed off, but awoke himself by sheer force of will.

"It would never do," he thought; "they know I started to swim ashore and they are not sure that the boat found me. They may come here to look for me and I shall surely be caught. I am in Japan, but here at my feet is the sea, everybody's territory. A mile out I may come on a Russian ship and be in Russia."

He arose and started for the fisher-village, the inhabitants of which were sleeping peacefully. As he

approached he noticed, to his extreme satisfaction, that numerous boats were pulled up on the beach and that here and there a small sailing craft was anchored. He waded out to one of these. It was about what he desired, but he found a Japanese lad of twelve or fourteen sleeping in the bottom, covered with a tarpaulin. He bent over the lad for a moment, reflecting. He must kill him, of course. It would be impossible to raise the sail and get away without waking him. Even should this be accomplished, the lad would be a nuisance. Romanoff drew his knife and pulled back the tarpaulin gently. He held the point about an inch above the boy's heart and hardened his muscles to shove the blade home. At that moment the lad smiled, stirred in his sleep and muttered something. Out of pure curiosity Romanoff listened. The boy muttered again, repeating a girl's name. The Russian stood for a moment longer, with his knife at the sleeper's heart; and then he stole away.

"After all," he reflected, "I might just as well take a boat with nobody in it. I have no objection to killing another Jap, but why break up a love-affair?"

He waded over to another boat, a short distance away, and found it unoccupied. He commenced hasty preparations for sailing, when it occurred to

him that he ought, at least, to give some thought to the matter of provisions and water. He looked about and observed an isolated hut a short distance from him. He determined to raid it. There surely must be some cooked rice and a jug of water in it. He ran to the hut and peeped in at the square hole that did duty as a window. Again Saint Nicholas was with him, for there was no one at home save one old woman, asleep on a mat. Romanoff cautiously worked the sliding door open and entered. He found some raw millet, a jar of cooked rice, some preserved lily root, some dried fish and a water bucket, about half full. He dumped the food all together into a crock and tiptoed from the hut with the bucket and the provisions without waking the old woman.

Five minutes later he was in his boat, putting out to sea with the aid of a rising wind blowing off shore. He had not gone far, however, before he became fearful that a storm was rising which his clumsy little boat would not be able to weather. He was not much of a sailor, and the storm at last broke on him so suddenly that he had not time to get down his patched canvas, which was ripped from top to bottom and whipped to tatters. This, of course, saved the boat from being overturned, and he was

now scudding along under bare poles. As the storm increased in fury, Romanoff intrusted himself to the care of the Virgin and all the saints, crossing himself again and again. It was their aid, he firmly believed to the end of his days, that prevented the little boat from foundering. Certain it is that the smallest craft will sometimes outride the severest storm.

The Russian was pitched about for hours, heaved one moment to the top of a watery crest, swooped the next to the bottom of the abyss, with the waves towering above him. But the storm subsided as suddenly as it had come up, and at seven o'clock he was riding over a wild but falling sea, which gleamed red as blood in the rays of the early sun. He ate some of the rice and a couple of the salt fish. Then, lifting the bucket to his lips, he threw back his head and took a copious swallow.

"In the name of the Evil One!" he exclaimed, setting the bucket down again, and spitting from his mouth as much of the liquid as remained. "What vile brew is this?"

The after-taste and a glance at the contents of the pail were enough to convince him that he had brought away with him several quarts of *shiro-saké*, or white *saké*, the intoxicating liquor of

Japan, made from rice. The beverage was a trifle sour, and for the moment refreshed him, but he well knew that if he were not rescued before very long, he would be burned alive, driven mad, by consuming thirst. He was very tired now, so he stretched himself out in the bottom of the boat and fell asleep. When he awoke, the sun was directly overhead. He felt refreshed and strong again, but was ravenously hungry and very thirsty. He had no idea where he was, but realized that he had been blown steadily out to sea, from the fact that the hills of Japan were no longer visible. He scanned the entire horizon, but not a sail was in sight. He ate a little, and took a sip of *saké*. The sun was blistering hot and there was not a particle of wind. The boat cradled idly on a gently-swelling sea, the boom creaking against the mast.

His thirst was now so great that he felt seriously alarmed, and for the first time since dropping over the side of the *Teijo Maru*, he began to lose faith in his destiny. With a jug of water and a little food he would have had several days in which to await rescue. But with *saké* it was a different matter. A man in Romanoff's case realizes, if never before, how truly alcohol is the enemy, water the friend, of the human race.

"Curse the besotted old beast!" he growled, thinking of the old woman whose *saké* he had stolen. "I might have known that all Japanese are drunkards. Why did I not taste the stuff before bringing it away with me? All the saints in Heaven can't help a fool!"

It was the nature of the man that now, as he began to suffer, he longed for revenge on any one on whom he could fix the blame for his present predicament. The more he thought of the matter the stronger became his belief that Courtland Hardy was a spy in the employ of the Japanese. His Russian training rendered it easy for him to entertain this theory.

"The Americans are notorious Japanese sympathizers," he reflected, "and they will do anything for money. He stayed there with them, and I was sent away for imprisonment, possibly death."

It occurred to him that if he should lose his reason through thirst and be picked up by a Russian ship, it would be well to have the plans, which he had brought away, where they could be found. He therefore split open the shoe sole with his knife.

"They are gone," he cried, "I am right! It was Hardy who insisted that I take off my shoes. Had he not been a spy, they would surely have detained

him when they found him photographing the fortifications, when they took from his pockets the papers I put there. We may meet again, Mr. Hardy. God, how thirsty I am!"

He gazed long at the cool, salt, bitter waters of the sea; he trailed his hands in them over the sides of the boat. Then he picked up the bucket of white *saké*, looked into its lying contents, raised it to his lips, but set it down again.

"I must not," he said, "it only makes the thirst greater."

CHAPTER X

MAN'S INGRATITUDE

'As the sun began to decline in the sky Romanoff was able to get his bearings and to determine in which direction was Russia. He reckoned that Vladivostok must be about two hundred and fifty miles distant, and he wondered if a man could row that distance. At any rate, the nearer he got to Siberia the greater would be his chances of running into a Russian ship. There was a pair of oars in the bottom of the boat. He picked them up, headed for the setting sun, and pulled for a couple of hours. During this time his thirst grew, increased by the exertion.

"I could pull to Vladivostok easily, if I had plenty of water," he mused. "Six miles an hour, two hundred and forty miles, that's only forty hours. If I had a drink of water I could swim to Vladivostok. A man can do anything if he only has water."

He picked up the bucket of *saké* again and gazed

into its depths longingly. If it were only red or black, like wine, it would be easier to resist it; but it so resembled water! He set it down firmly, and, cutting a bit of leather from the shoe sole, chewed it. This excited the salivary glands and slightly moistened his tongue, affording him a sort of relief. The sun was blistering hot now and not the slightest breath of air was stirring. On his estate near Moscow, he remembered, there was a watering-trough by the roadside. It was covered with moss and a shady oak spread its branches above it. The water where it entered bubbled up for an inch or so above the surface, and overflowed at the side where the horses had bitten a deep indentation. He did not dare to row any more, for he knew now that his only chance was to resist the awful fever that was consuming his vitals and parching his throat. It seemed to him that he could endure it better if he were in a great desert, but to be surrounded thus by water enough to float the navies of the world, all of it salt and bitter, was maddening mockery.

If he had only taken a drink before leaving the *Teijo Maru!* His last drink of water had been there at the Aomori restaurant, at two the day before and it was now about three in the afternoon. If a man could get so thirsty in twenty-five hours, what

would his condition be after two or three days without water ?

If he went mad and was rescued, would he recover his reason ?

He sat still in the stern, scanning the horizon every few minutes for a sail. Even a Japanese boat, he reflected, would have water on board, and his only hope of being saved lay in the possibility of being picked up by a passing ship. He now resolved, if he came alive to Russian land, to erect a church to Saint Nicholas instead of a shrine, and, after making this promise, he followed the entire circle of the horizon around with his eye, expecting that the white of a sail coming toward him would take shape out of the blue, or that some low-lying cloud would resolve itself into a trailing feather of smoke. But his hopes were not realized and he remembered now, with fear and chagrin, that he had once made a promise to a minor saint that he had not fulfilled. For hours he sat without seeing the sign of a sail, and then, just at sunset, two boats passed, going in opposite directions, one far to the north, the other an equal distance to the south.

As the cool of the evening came on he was able to endure his thirst a trifle better. He chewed another piece of the leather, and his tongue, which had

felt large and stiff in his mouth, became limber and moist again, and hope, that elusive and often lying phantom that rarely deserts a man till his eyes shut for ever on the scenes of the world, once more smiled on him. If war broke out between Japan and Russia, he would be sure to get hold of Aisome, he would certainly have another meeting with Hardy.

It flashed over him now that the latter was a Jew. He was shrewd and dark, and there are millions of Jews in America.

He slept some during the night, but every time he awoke his first thought was of that watering-trough on his estate, of the green frogs that floated on it, with their bulging eyes above the surface and their legs trailing behind. He remembered, too, the snails, some of them over two inches in length, and how cold they were to the touch.

Dawn came at last, and soon the broad disk of the sun was standing on the edge of the sea, and its rays spread out over the surface of the ocean in a giant fan of rosy light. The heat began immediately to make itself felt. Romanoff arose to his full height and, turning slowly about, scanned the entire horizon. There was not a sail in sight, not a sign of help anywhere.

His tongue, an inert, swollen mass in his parched throat, was choking him. He laughed wildly and cursed the Virgin, Saint Nicholas and all the saints. Then he lifted the bucket of *saké*, thinking to drink deep of it, to drain it to the dregs and to die in a drunken delirium. He took several swallows, when, chancing to raise his eyes, something caught his attention,—something far away, low down where the blue of the sea melted into the blue of the sky. He set the bucket down and gazed long, straining his bloodshot eyes. Then the object grew more and more distinct, it took definite shape, it left the sky behind it and stood out alone on the waters,—the square sail of a Chinese sampan.

For twenty minutes, for half an hour, the Russian did not move. The uncouth craft was coming on with a following wind; her low flat hull became visible. Romanoff seized the bucket of *saké*, whirled it and threw it to a great distance. Then he dropped on his knees and thanked the Virgin and the saints for his deliverance, which he believed to be as good as accomplished. The sampan approached nearer and he observed that he would pass some distance to the leeward of it. He grabbed the oars and rowed madly, strengthened by his hope.

His only thought was that there would be water

on the sampan. She came on slowly, her great quilted sail swelling in the gentle breeze. A giant woman stood at the tiller, and a little old Chinese was busy about the deck. Romanoff yelled at them frantically, again and again, in Russian, in the few words of Chinese which he knew, in his perfect Japanese, but they stood looking at him and paid no heed. He feared he would not reach them, and redoubled his efforts, till the muscles of his arms and mightily back stood out in knots. He shouted at them in Japanese:

“I am a Russian prince. Take me on board and give me water and I will make you rich!” But they did not lay by. They only continued to gaze at him in wonder and to chatter with each other. If they understood him, his appearance did not corroborate his words. As the boat came up to the sampan, near the prow, the Chinese shrieked in sudden terror:

“He is a madman; he will kill us! Keep off!”—and ran to the low rail with a boat-hook in his hand. But Romanoff, dropping his oars, seized the small anchor, which was attached to the prow of his own boat by means of a long line, and, whirling it about his head, hurled it at the unfortunate Chinese. It struck him full in the stomach and he dropped on the deck, vomiting blood. His wife dashed into the

cabin and emerged almost immediately with an ax, but she was too late, for Romanoff had seized the anchor rope and pulled himself on board, where he stood now, awaiting her onslaught, with the boat-hook in his hand. He was a terrifying apparition, in his underclothes, his bare feet, his eyes inflamed, his parched lips drawn back from his teeth.

"Water, damn you, water!" he yelled, advancing on the woman. She hurled the ax at his head and missed. He knocked her down with the boat-hook and rushed into the cabin. There he found a large earthen crock of water and a gourd by it. He dipped the gourd full and drank it all. Then he dipped again and drank again. Sliding down on the floor beside the tall crock, he sat clasping it between his knees, embracing it with his brawny arms, his cheek against its cool, moist side; and as he sat thus he laughed caressingly, calling it sweet Russian diminutives, as though it were a woman.

He must have remained in the cabin for at least half an hour, taking an occasional sip of the water, when, his thirst being appeased, he remembered that he was very hungry and he ate heartily of baked pork and cooked rice; after which, crossing himself devoutly, he went out on the deck. The Chinese lay as he had fallen and his wife was sitting up, look-

ing about in a dazed way. Romanoff lifted the body of the Chinese as lightly as though it had been a bag of bran and pitched it carelessly into the sea. Then he felt of the woman's skull, to see if it were broken or not. Satisfied by his examination, and by the dawning hate and fear in her eyes, that she was not seriously injured, he demanded in his bad Chinese :

“Where from?”

“Korea.”

“And where to?”

“Japan.”

“No,” he said, “you are mistaken. You are bound for Vladivostok.”

“To Japan,” she repeated, “to Japan.”

Romanoff put the point of his knife to her throat.

“Where are you going?” he asked again. “I will give you till I count five to decide. One—two—”

“To Vladivostok,” said the woman.

“Good! then take the tiller and turn about.”

CHAPTER XI

ZAKOUSKA

The Russian steamer that took Hardy into Vladivostok was an iron tub of the tramp variety, and not a soul on board could speak a word of any tongue ever heard before by the American. He soon became aware, however, that the red-faced burly captain and his two officers meant to be kind to him, and that their idea of friendliness consisted principally in getting him to eat and drink as much and as frequently as possible. After vainly attempting to converse with him and learning only that he was American, the captain led him to the dining-room and introduced him to one of the great institutions of Russia, the *zakouska*, a lunch of hors-d'œuvres, washed down with much strong drink. At one end of the room, near the sideboard, a table was set, spread with dishes of sardines, sardels, caviar, chunks of pickled fish, sandwiches, and shrimp in bottles. The captain poured out two generous bump-

ers of a white liquid into glasses, handed one to Hardy, clinked and drained the contents of the other at a gulp. Hardy swallowed the liquid, and the tears came into his eyes; he nearly strangled. He looked about for water, but in vain. He was to learn soon that water, for drinking and washing purposes, is the one thing most difficult of all to obtain in Holy Russia.

“Vodka,” explained the captain with an inquiring smile, and poured out two more bumpers.

Hardy refused, his host urging him to drink, with many good-natured gestures. But the American indicated, by pointing to the vodka, and imitating the actions of a drunken man, that he feared the effects of over-indulgence. The captain now picked out bits of food from the various dishes, which he offered to Hardy on a fork, eating meanwhile with much relish, and washing the morsels down with frequent potations of the white, fiery liquid. Every time he took a drink, he insisted so strongly on his guest's joining him that the latter had great difficulty in not appearing churlish, and at the same time keeping his head. He was not in the habit of indulging in liquor to excess and vodka appeared to him to bear a striking resemblance, both in color and quality, to pure alcohol. He did not observe that the

Russian was in the least affected by his frequent potations.

They lingered at the *zakouska* for fifteen or twenty minutes, when the captain escorted him to a cabin, a comfortable room on the upper deck, and left him to his meditations, which were, in the main, pleasant enough.

He was surely on the way to Russia now; he had escaped with his life, and even with his baggage and his money, from extraordinary and unlooked-for perils. He knew he was going to Vladivostok, for he had said "Vladivostok?" to the captain several times with a rising inflection, and the reply had always been, "*Da! da! da!*" (Pronounced *dah*) "Vladivostok."

"*Da! da! da!*" he reasoned, probably meant yes, and, if so, he had already learned his first Russian word.

The people, he argued, were a friendly, hospitable, simple-hearted sort, to be judged rather by this captain than by Stapleton Neville, who was a spy, after all, and spies, from the very nature of their calling, are treacherous and unreliable.

He wondered what the Japanese would do to the pseudo-Englishman and hoped that they would not kill him. He thought of Aisome again, and he could

not be sure whether he had been the victim of treachery on her part. Whenever he was quite convinced that such was the case, the memory of that dewy kiss at the wharf in Japan would arise and plead in her defense, and it seemed to him that he could smell once more the exquisite perfume of her hair, like the haunting soul of some rare and priceless flower. He wondered if he should ever see her again, and free her from this taint of suspicion. The thing seemed scarcely possible, yet he realized that it would give him great satisfaction.

As he was immersed in these thoughts, there was a loud knock on his door. He opened and found one of the two officers standing there, smiling affably.

"Zakouska?" inquired the mate.

Hardy now found that he knew two Russian words. *"Zakouska,"* he remembered, from hearing the captain use it, signified sandwiches, pickles, caviar, sardels, chunks of fish, vodka, vodka, vodka. His first impulse was to refuse. He certainly wanted no more vodka, and his appetite was appeased. Yet, he must not let these people outdo him in courtesy. They meant well, and, besides, they were the people among whom he was going to take up his residence. It flashed across his mind, too, that here was an op-

portunity to consummate his first complete Russian conversation. So he smiled and replied, "*Da! da, da!*" The officer linked arms with him and conducted him to the dining-room, where Hardy consumed his second glass of wheat whisky, and ate more sandwiches, pickles, caviar and salt fish.

Zakouska lasted, off and on, for about an hour, during which the captain and his two officers ate and drank almost continually, appearing to get hungrier and hungrier all the time and to suffer no unduly exhilarating effects from the vodka.

By combining the utmost firmness with evident good nature, Hardy managed to pull through without getting drunk, thereby accomplishing a feat quite remarkable in a foreigner accepting Russian hospitality.

Luncheon was at last brought on, consisting of sour, cold soup, meat boiled with vegetables, and more caviar, flanked by a bottle of excellent white wine from the Crimea.

The samovar, filled with water kept hot by means of coals poured into a receptacle in its interior, was now brought in, and a small pot of very strong tea. The Russians turned a little of the tea into water glasses, which they filled with hot water from the samovar, and seasoned with sugar and slices of

lemon. Hardy could not help comparing this method with that of the Japanese, who drink their tea without "trimmin's," and directly from the grounds, on which they let the decoction stand only a few moments. The captain and the two officers each drank half a dozen cups of tea, and urged the beverage on their guest, who, in this case as in that of the vodka, was unable to do his share; not this time, however, because he feared intoxicating effects, but for the reason that his stomach lacked sufficient powers of distention. He accepted with gratitude, however, several of the long cigarettes, mostly paper mouth pieces, but containing a few whiffs of excellent tobacco, which they offered him. After swallowing, for politeness' sake, all the tea that he could contain without bursting, Hardy made a sign, easily comprehended, that he was sleepy, and went to his cabin. Stretching himself on the bunk, he fell into a sound slumber, which had endured, as it seemed to him, only a few minutes, when he was awakened by a loud knocking on his door.

"*Da? da?*" he yelled inquiringly.

"*Zakouska,*" shouted the gruff, friendly voice of the captain through the door.

"*Zakouska?*" inquired Hardy.

"*Da, da, da, da!*" replied the captain.

The American consulted his watch. It was six o'clock and he felt no more hunger than if he had just eaten. Nevertheless, he opened the door and locked arms with the captain, who conducted him to the dining-room, where another *zakouska* ordeal was gone through, lasting till seven, when dinner was served, after which the samovar was again brought in, and the Russians settled down to tea-drinking in earnest.

The next afternoon they entered the magnificent harbor of Vladivostok, passing the high rock, crowned with a lighthouse, that stands as a sentinel at its mouth. The city, not visible till the last moment, burst suddenly on Hardy's view and gave him a very favorable impression of the country into which he had come to live and to retrieve, if possible, his shattered fortunes. Here, crowning the hills that dominate the harbor, was a modern, European city of houses, many of them several stories in height, evidently built of brick and stone. A couple of men-of-war, very trim in their white paint, besides numerous merchant vessels flying the Russian flag, lay at anchor in the bay, while several Chinese sampans and a junk or two, drifting about, bore witness that here the extremes of the East and the West meet and overlap. Two or three of the sampans, indeed,

floated up to Hardy's ship as she cast anchor, and their long-cued owners made clamorous application to carry any one ashore who might wish to go. Hardy had already picked out the Celestial whose appearance best suited him, wondering whether he would take Japanese money, when he noticed a steam-launch rapidly approaching, and a cheerful voice hailed him.

"Is that an American on board there?"

"Yes," Hardy shouted back, thrilling with sudden delight at the sound of his mother-tongue, "how did you know?"

"By the cut of your clothes. Where's your baggage?"

"In my cabin."

"All right," said the man in the launch, "I'll have it brought out. Get in here and I'll take you ashore."

A few words of gruff Russian to the captain, and Hardy's trunks and baggage were brought out, and five minutes later he was flying ashore in the launch of the American Trading Company.

As he was leaving, the captain dashed up and wrung his hand, asking anxiously:

"*Zakouska?*"

"He wants to know," explained Hardy, leaning over the rail, "if I want more *zakouska*. I've had

zakouska enough to last me a lifetime. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him '*nyet!*'" came the reply, and the American shook the hands of the captain and his two kind-hearted officers vigorously, repeating many times:

"Nyet! nyet! nyet! nyet!"

And thus he learned his third Russian word.

CHAPTER XII

ENTER THE PRINCESS

"I want to go to the American consul's," said Hardy, "as soon as I land, and then I should like to get located in a hotel, till I can catch the first comfortable steamer up the river. It's fortunate for me you came out to take me off, for my knowledge of Russian is, as yet, rather limited."

"You can start up the river day after to-morrow," replied the Vladivostok agent, "on the *Alexsay*, which goes as far as Blagovestchensk. You will be quite comfortable on her, and will be likely to get a room all to yourself, as I understand she is not crowded."

"That will suit me perfectly," said Hardy. "I see no reason for lingering here, fascinating as the town looks, any longer than is necessary."

"By the way," volunteered the other, "you will have quite a distinguished traveling companion, if you go on the *Alexsay*, the Princess Romanovna,

who has been here visiting her relative, General Romanoff. She has made a sensation in the garrison society here. She's a stunning-looking woman."

"Women do not interest me," replied Hardy. "I came here to work, not to mingle in fashionable society, and, anyhow,"—suddenly remembering his changed fortunes,—“it is not likely that a princess would become wildly enthusiastic over a store-keeper.”

The customs officials proved little troublesome, and Hardy's baggage was loaded on the backs of several Korean boys, in ragged, filthy garments, and with pitiful, pathetic, beautiful girl features. They were equipped with wooden platforms built out from their backs and supported by means of straps passed over and under the shoulders.

"*Gosteenneetsa!*" commanded the agent, as soon as the trunks and valises were lifted to these platforms. The boys moved away, bending low under their heavy burdens. "But hold on a minute," added the agent, "I'd better pay them here, as you don't understand the language and they wouldn't be satisfied, no matter what you gave them."

He put a few coins into each of the outstretched palms and the boys departed.

"What does 'gusty'-something-or-other mean?"

asked Hardy. "Get along with you? I noticed they moved off very meekly after you said it."

"*Gostecnneetsa?* It's the Russian word for hotel and you had better remember it. By the way, those boys will wait at the hotel till you come, if it is three days from now, and will set up a pitiful wail for more money. They'll bother the life out of you if you show the least sign of yielding. I have paid them the regular price and a little over. Just slap their faces and give them a kick or two and they will leave. There's no other way to treat them. They are the very dregs of humanity, whining beggars and thieves, mere vermin in human form. I'll put you into a droshky now and tell the man to drive you to Consul Greener's. Sorry I can't go with you, but we're pretty busy here."

At the agent's summons, a carriage resembling a victoria came up, drawn by two active, nervous little horses, one between the shafts and wearing a huge arch of wood over his haunches, the other running free, between long loose traces. The *isvoschik* got down from the box and saluted,—he was a stolid-appearing Russian, wearing a blouse, a shiny cabman's hat and a pair of high boots, into the tops of which his trousers were tucked. Swinging the long lash of his whip about the horses' ears, he

yelled at them, and Hardy was off through the hilly, rocky streets of Vladivostok, his carriage bounding over stones and dipping into ruts, while the maddened steeds, their ears lying low and their bellies close to the ground, tore and scrambled along. The whip-lash of the reckless Jehu writhed continually in the air, cracking like a series of pistol-shots. The feet of the horse under the arch clattered rapidly with the regular sound of resolute galloping, while the other at times ran close to him, at times far away, with a quarter of the width of the road between himself and his mate. Occasionally he turned, for a moment, at right angles to the animal between the shafts, then, at a crack of the lash, he would turn head on and leap forward, giving the carriage a jerk that nearly broke the back of its occupant.

Down almost perpendicular declivities they ricocheted, the horses scampering like rabbits to keep out of the droshky's way, and around unexpected corners, the two rear wheels of the vehicle sliding sidewise and throwing a shower of stones into the air. Hardy wondered if the agent had promised the *izvoschik* a great reward if he broke the record for speed, or if he had told him that somebody was breathing his last and that he was running a race with death. But this seemed hardly possible, for,

from his perilous seat, to which he was clinging with both hands, he could see other droshkies flying about, as though all the cabmen of Vladivostok were mad. At times the *isvoschik*, catching sight of some shrine or church, would rise to his full height, cross himself reverently, then drop back into the seat, swear at his frightened and frantic steeds, and let off another volley from his whip-lash.

Once, as they were going up a hill, the two steeds running neck and neck, another droshky came flying down, and as it swayed from side to side, like a quadriga in a chariot race, the hubs clicked against those of Hardy's vehicle in passing.

A woman was its occupant, and, in the brief glimpse that Hardy got of her, he noticed that her hair was yellow and that she was unmistakably an aristocrat. The *isvoschik* looked about with democratic friendliness and shouted, pointing over his shoulder with his whip-stock:

"Romanovna!"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Hardy, "she certainly is beautiful!"—and he speculated as to whether he would ever attain a position, here in Siberia, which would enable him to associate with such as she. In the old days of the yacht and the cotillions in Mrs. Johnny Folkstone's set, this would have been the

sort of woman he would naturally associate with. But he was entering on a mercantile career now, and she would be likely to regard him with well-bred contempt. No, he would be her fellow passenger for days on the *Alexsay*, but he could not even gain a speaking acquaintance with her. As these thoughts were passing through his mind, the cabman suddenly brought the horses to a dead stop by a tremendous yank at the lines, nearly precipitating Hardy over the dashboard, and pointed to a large, square house.

He had arrived at the American consul's.

Our affable and efficient representative at Vladivostok received him with open arms and overwhelmed him with courtesy. He gave him much good advice, warning him, among other things, against criticizing the government or making any disrespectful remarks concerning anybody in public office.

"Remember," he said, "that you are in Russia now and not in America. This is a splendid, kind-hearted, generous people, and, as long as you keep a discreet tongue in your head, you will get along all right and nobody will interfere with you. By the way, I see that you have a camera with you. You will not be allowed to use that anywhere in the coun-

try, without a special permit. You might as well put it up, as you will not be stopping long enough in any place to get the necessary permit, and for traveling a general order would be required from the chief of police at St. Petersburg."

Hardy smiled.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that the government of this country interferes in such trivial personal matters as the taking of a few bits of scenery and groups of peasants? Well, if that is so, that is a paternal form of government, to say the least.

"Now, there you go!" exclaimed the consul. "If you do much of that sort of talking, you will be appealing to me to get you out of trouble before you leave Vladivostok. You really must let the government alone. Find out what the police regulations are and comply with them. After you have been here a while, you will learn that it is possible to do anything, if you only go about it in the right way. Let the photographing go now, but get your general permit as soon as possible for your next journey."

During the course of the evening, Hardy told his adventures in Japan, and of the discomfiture of Stapleton Neville. The consul whistled and looked serious.

"I hope the Japanese will make away with him.

he remarked, "for your sake, for he will never forgive you for not being victimized by him. So the war fever is running high in Japan, eh? Poor little country! Russia will crush her as a bull does a toad, and it's a pity, too, for the Japanese are picturesque. By the way, have you sheets and a blanket with you?"

"No," replied Hardy, "why?"

"They won't furnish you with any at the hotel, and you'll need a blanket, as it's a trifle chilly tonight. You had better let me lend you some bed-clothes."

After bidding the consul good night, Hardy went to his hotel. He was glad that he had brought the consul's bedding along, as he found that he did, indeed, need it. After washing his face and hands he discovered that he also needed a towel, and, going to the door, he shouted for a servant. A Chinese boy appeared, to whom, by signs, he indicated his desire, but the boy, with an insolent gesture, departed and was seen no more. Hardy now made such an uproar that the proprietor at last came on the scene; and he, too, after a voluble outburst, went away and refused to interest himself further in the matter. This incident irritated the American. He wiped his face and hands on one of Consul Greener's

sheets and was still thinking about it when he was startled by a loud rapping at the door. He opened it and was confronted by a thin-faced, apologetic old gentleman.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said in perfect English, "I beg ten thousand pardons for disturbing you, but the police wish to see you."

"And will you kindly inform me," said Hardy, "what the police wish of me?"

"Certainly, sir. They merely wish to extend to you a formal welcome to this country; to ask if you have anything to complain of so far, and to find out if there is anything they can do for you."

"Please extend to the police the assurances of my most distinguished consideration; tell them for me that I have nothing to complain of and that there is only one thing that I wish of them."

"And that?"

"Is for them to leave me undisturbed."

"I should regret," said the apologetic old gentleman kindly, "to convey to them any such message as that."

"Perhaps it would be as well, then, to take them no message at all, except that I am tired and wish to go to bed. So, if you will excuse me—"

"I hope," said the old gentleman, "that you will

not put them to the disagreeable alternative of changing their request into a command."

Hardy, remembering the consul's advice, and much wondering, picked up his hat.

"You will not need your hat," said the old gentleman, "they have, for your convenience, taken a temporary office in one of the rooms of the hotel."

"Oh, that's very kind of them!" exclaimed Hardy; "I'm deeply grateful that they did not take up their quarters in my room."

He followed the old gentleman down a flight of stairs and into an apartment, where, on the opposite side of a table, sat two officers in uniform, one of middle age, very corpulent, the other a dapper little lieutenant, whose brass buttons shone as though they had been recently polished.

Hardy was motioned to a seat, which he took, and then was minutely questioned by both officers, the old gentleman acting as interpreter and taking voluminous notes. The questions concerned Hardy's nationality, the place of his birth, the length of time he had been in Japan, his business in Russia, his destination, and so on. His passport was examined and taken charge of, with the promise that it would be returned to him in the morning, and then he was asked if he was satisfied with his treatment so far,

and if there was anything the authorities could do for him. To the last question he replied in the negative. Then the two officers arose and shook hands with him and he started for the door; but just as he was passing out, a whimsical notion came into his head and his sense of humor was aroused.

"There is one thing the authorities can do for me," he said.

The officers were delighted and they bowed their acquiescence.

"Tell them," he said to the old man, "that they can use their influence with mine host here to get a clean towel for me. If necessary, let them invoke the entire power of the Russian government to that end."

The interpreter hesitated a moment and then translated. The faces of the officers flushed and darkened, but they ordered the Boniface called. They spoke a few words to him and Hardy departed. A minute later his door was opened and an incredibly filthy towel was pitched into the room.

The next morning Hardy took his place in the railway train bound north through Siberia for Khabarovka, on the Amur. He had obtained a first-class compartment and sat waiting for the train to pull out on schedule time,—eight o'clock.

The hour arrived but the train did not move. A quarter-past, half-past, and still there were no signs of departure. At last, impatient, he arose and stepped out into the long narrow hall that ran the entire length of the car. An intelligent-looking Russian was pacing up and down, and him Hardy asked, in the best French at his command:

"What is the matter? Why do we not start?"

"*On attend,*" replied the Russian; "they are waiting for the Princess Romanovna,—ah! here she comes now!"

The American looked from the window. A droshky was driving up, and in it sat a tall, slender and exquisitely graceful woman, fairly smothered in costly flowers that filled the carriage and were piled beside her on the seat. Her face was of the purest Russian type, her complexion was marvelous, her eyes were a laughing blue, and her hair was of the color of ripe wheat. Half a dozen young officers, in natty uniforms, and riding spirited horses, accompanied her.

"By Jove!" sighed Hardy, "but she's a thoroughbred and a beauty, too!"

The Princess took plenty of time for her adieus, after which she languidly and gracefully entered the car. The officers brought her flowers in to her, and

descended to the platform, where they stood in a adoring and sorrowful group, their caps in the hands. And then, her Highness the Princess Romanovna being aboard, the train started slowly on five-hundred-mile journey to Khabarovka.

CHAPTER XIII

INTO SIBERIA

The journey into Siberia was begun! Siberia, that vast mysterious region whose very name has come to be synonymous with all that is most dreaded by the human race—exile, eternal farewells, the clanking of chains over endless frozen roads, the knout, despair, all the horrors of a living death!

Hardy sat in his compartment of one of the first-class cars and gazed from the window, eagerly scanning the landscape for some sign or evidence of the things that had given the country its sinister reputation. His first impression, as the train left Vladivostok behind, was a complete refutation of all preconceived notions. There were no convicts anywhere in sight, no fields of ice or snow. Instead, he was journeying on a pleasant summer's day through a vividly green prairie, wide as the eye could reach, where fat cattle waded up to their knees in lush grass, and yellow dandelions, as large

at tea saucers, and fierce tiger-lilies, swayed and nodded by the million in the balmy breeze. He had expected to find something different, somehow, in the aspect of Siberia itself, something sinister and forbidding. Yet this, save for the greater luxuriance of the vegetation and the profusion and brilliancy of the flowers, might have been a stretch of Minnesota or Manitoba. He was in the same old familiar world, and the idea occurred to him that man, not God, has made countries good or bad. He thought, too, of old Frederick Emery's characterization of Siberia as a region of unlimited resources and virgin opportunities, and he felt a resolve springing within him to seize strenuously on every chance thrown in his way, to show himself the stuff of which pioneers and conquerers are made. If a man had any desire to put an unpleasant past behind him and begin anew, here certainly was the place to do it.

There were two couches in his compartment, the one serving as a seat or lounge by day, the other folding back against the wall into a comfortable back seat. As the train was not crowded, Hardy had the entire compartment for himself and undisturbed opportunity for reflection.

Again his experience in Japan and on the Japan

Sea ran through his mind, and he could not help comparing this country with the land of the mikado.

“Two countries and peoples more entirely and radically different from each other,” he mused, “it would be difficult to imagine. What a difference there is between these lonely stretches of prairie and the teeming rice-fields and villages of Japan! Between the muzhik in his blouse and high boots and the little slant-eyed Asiatic; between the droshky with its two wild horses and the jinrikisha; between these stolid-faced peasant women and the picturesque geishas; between Aisome and the Princess Romanovna!”

He was soon to learn that the women of Russia are quite as fun-loving as their sisters of the island empire, and that the daughters of France or Italy are stolid in comparison with them. That the “eternal feminine” lives on amid the snows and solitudes of Siberia and exists even in the hearts of the lowliest peasants was made evident at the desolate little stations where they stopped to take on wood and water for the engines, for the women who thronged the platforms with bottles of milk and bouquets of gorgeous wild flowers, or who stood at long counters laden with country produce, were gay with bits of bright color.

Weary at last of sitting, Hardy went out into the long hall at one side of the car and walked up and down. Here he found the Russian who spoke French, also promenading, and squeezed against the wall several times to let him pass.

"Pardon, Monsieur," said this gentleman as the train stopped, "but we remain here long enough to take *zakouska*. Perhaps you feel the need of refreshment? Do you know what the *zakouska* is?"

"Oh, yes," replied Hardy laughing, "I know what *zakouska* is very well. I should indeed like some."

He had thought that he should never want *zakouska* again, but he was hungry now and tired, and this Russian custom appealed to him as an agreeable institution. He joined his new-found friend and the two descended to the platform together and entered a low wooden building where a throng of Russians from the first, second and third-class compartments were crowding around a long bar in the most democratic manner, partaking of sandwiches, salt fish, caviar and vodka, vodka, vodka. Hardy ate of the various hors-d'œuvres and drank a glass of vodka and found it good. Then, after a great ringing of bells, he went aboard.

"Where do we get dinner?" he asked, as the train again got in motion. He was informed that the mid-

day meal would be served at another station about a mile farther on. He felt hungry and took pride in the fact that he was becoming Russianized rapidly.

"Have you secured your compartment on the *Alexsay?*" asked the Russian.

"No," replied Hardy, "why? Will the boat be crowded?"

"I hardly think so, but the Princess Romanovna is going on her, and it is likely that all the best accommodations will have been reserved for her. Fortunately, she does not seem to be traveling with much of a suite. Her Highness will probably require two or three cabins for herself, a couple for her baggage, one for each of her two maids, and one for her man."

"And will she be given all this, even if the rest of us are compelled to sleep on the decks?"

"Certainly," replied the Russian. "Her Highness is—her Highness."

Hardy was about to declaim against a government where the aristocracy enjoyed such privileges, but, fortunately, his French was not quite equal to his indignation, and in the moment of hesitation he remembered Consul Greener's warning.

"And who in the world is the Princess Romanovna?" he asked with a slight tinge of sarcasm. He

would have liked to say, "who in the dickens," but he did not know the French for "the dickens."

"The Princess Romanovna," explained the Russian, "belongs to one of the oldest families in the empire. She is a distant relative of the czar, who is my imperial master,"—and here he took his hat off. "She is immensely rich and has city palaces at Moscow and Petersburg, besides a country estate near the former city. She is as wealthy as she is beautiful."

"She must be very wealthy then," said the American with conviction.

The Russian smiled.

"Monsieur speaks the truth," he said. "He is also like all Americans, very gallant. When we take *zakouska* again, we will drink to the Princess Romanovna."

"With pleasure," said Hardy.

After two very comfortable nights, the train bearing Frederick Courtland Hardy arrived, about noon, at Khabarovka, on the lordly Amur. It had been raining and the low wooden station resembled an ark stranded in seas of black mud.

Hardy found an agent of the company awaiting him here, a San Franciscan who nearly fell on his neck at seeing a fellow countryman and hearing

again the English language spoken. He did not know that Americans could become so demonstrative. His goods were loaded upon a *telega*, a sort of long boat upon wheels and without springs; and were sent away to the *Alexsay* at its wharf, two or three miles distant, while Hardy and the agent took seats in a droshky and tore furiously away to the company's store, over rocks and through ruts and puddles, the mud spraying in a centrifugal shower from the bumping and whizzing wheels.

"Tell him to drive slower," shouted Hardy. "We have plenty of time."

"No power on earth could make a Russian cabman drive slow," replied the agent; "they are the lineal descendants of Jehu, and their speed is a part of their natures. You might as well try to make the Amur run up hill."

That night, in darkness as black as ink and in a drizzling rain, Hardy went on board the *Alexsay*, to begin his long journey up the Amur. The water, the agent informed him, was rising, owing to the recent rains, and there would be little danger of grounding. The trip to Blagovestchensk should be made in five days.

"There is a little spice of danger attending the journey," said the agent, on taking leave; "the ship

that went up ahead of this was fired on by Manchurian brigands. I saw several bullet-holes in the side myself, made by rifle balls. But I hardly think you need feel much apprehension. Since the Chinese sacks destroyed Aigun, and killed every living man, woman and child that could not get away, the Chinese have been pretty quiet. That taught them a lesson they will not soon forget. I have heard it rumored that they have been somewhat emboldened late by Japanese agitators who are working among them. The Japanese, they tell me, are talking of war with Russia. Foolish people! The Russians would eat them up. Japan would be a Russian province two months after the declaration of hostilities. 'Twould be a pity, too,—Japan is a picturesque country, as I remember it."

Hardy laid under his bed that night an American rifle, the property of the Trading Company, taken by the agent's advice from the stores in Khabarovsk.

He slept soundly, but had a vivid dream of the Princess Romanovna and Aisome racing over a Manchurian meadow, the one in a droshky and the other in a jinrikisha.

CHAPTER XIV

HER HIGHNESS SMILES

The trip from Khabarovka to Blagovestchensk occupied five days and was uneventful when compared with the more exciting happenings that befell Courtland Hardy and his fellow passengers farther on. Still, two or three things occurred worthy of record; one, at least, that Hardy himself regarded as epochal in his life. He came into direct contact with the Princess Romanovna and acquired a nodding acquaintance with her. As this befell on the first day out, and as she nodded to him once each day, namely, in the morning, his good fortune brought to him four nods and as many very sweet smiles between Khabarovka and Blagovestchensk. It was perhaps fortunate that he could not talk to her, as she might have discouraged any advances. Anything of this kind would have hurt his pride, for the Courtland Hardys maintain the fiction of family superiority, and, in their hearts, believe themselves "just as

good as anybody," as the old song says of My Aunt Sally.

It was his skill with the pistol that caused the Princess to confess that she was aware of his existence, and allow the light of recognition to dawn once a day in her laughing blue eyes. I say "confess that she was aware," because, being a woman, she must have noticed him and wondered who he was as soon as she caught sight of him, for training and tradition had given him a reserved, aristocratic air, and he managed, somehow, even while traveling, to dress with quiet elegance.

It was during one of the long delays caused by the necessity of taking on wood, that Hardy's acquaintance with the Princess began. The *Alexsay* was a stern-wheeler, drawing three feet and a half of water, and she stopped five or six times each twenty-four hours for a fresh fuel supply, the men bringing it, two and two, on long bars down the steep bank and across the springy plank to the deck.

Learning that there would be a stop of about three hours, Hardy went out with one Julius Smulders to take a long walk in the woods, to gather wild flowers and to catch a sight of one of the cuckoos, that fill the forests of Siberia with their strange cries, exactly as though millions of invisible Swiss clocks

were hanging among the trees. On their return, the two men heard the sound of shooting.

“My God!” cried the American, his face blanching as he thought of the Princess, “I believe the brigands have attacked the boat.”

He ran toward the sound, followed by Smulders, and beheld General Catkoff shooting at a bottle on a stump, at a distance of twenty paces. The general was military governor of Irkutsk, now on his way to his post, from which he had been absent three months. He was a gray, corpulent man, with a kindly face, the only person aboard of sufficient rank to associate intimately with the Princess, in whom he seemed to take a fatherly interest. He fired now five times and missed, much to the amusement of the Princess, who stood near. In fact, her derisive laughter so irritated the pompous general that he threw the weapon spitefully on the ground and began to explain volubly to his fair tormentor.

“What does he say?” asked the German of a Viennese opera singer from Vladivostok, who was also one of the spectators; and a moment later he explained to Hardy.

“He says it’s an American pistol from Vladivostok, and that it’s no good.”

Courtland Hardy picked up the weapon and ex-

amined it. It was not an expensive model, but a practical arm of honest blue steel. He tossed it familiarly in his hand and then said to Smulders: "Will you ask our fair interpreter here to present my compliments to the general, and tell him that I am an American and beg the privilege of proving the excellence of this American weapon?"

As the Viennese addressed the general, Hardy lifted his hat gracefully. The Princess clapped her little hands, nodded pleasantly at the American and cried, "Bravo! Bravo!" It was she, evidently, who persuaded the general to reload the weapon and accede to the request.

Now, as usual, there was a group of peasant women standing about, who had come down to the boat from the Lord knows where, to sell milk. Hardy tossed fifty copecks on the ground, and, picking up five bottles, walked to a log near the stump, where he set them in a row. Then he returned to the group standing about the general and commenced firing. The distance was in reality not great nor the feat difficult for so good a shot. The effect, however, was spectacular, for between the rapid "cracks" of the weapon could be heard the "ching, ching, ching," of the breaking bottles.

Hardy offered the revolver to the general with a



Hardy offered the revolver with a polite salute *Page 122*



polite salute, but the latter generously complimented his marksmanship and begged that he would keep it, adding to the gift the box of cartridges which he produced from a coat pocket. The American was somewhat embarrassed. His pride was averse to the acceptance of the gift, yet he was unable to explain that he meant no offense. He stood offering the pistol to the Russian, while the latter pressed the cartridges on him. The Princess relieved the situation by taking the cartridges and handing them to Hardy with a beseeching little *moue*. He accepted with a courtly bow, as graceful as though he were saluting a cotillion partner. The Princess replied in kind and walked away on the arm of the general.

The whistle shrieked and they were off again, purring up the broad river. Occasionally a wild duck would arise ahead of them and whizz away, or a goose with long inquiring neck, writhing to right and left like a snake. Once a huge bear lumbered down on a spit of sand and looked at them, clumsily curious.

Up the broad yellow river they forged, the current purring against the prow, the patient engine breathing softly like a living thing. By clean pebbly beaches and rocky shores they steamed all day, with the endless green woods of Siberia on the right, the

endless green forests of Manchuria on the left. On the Russian side, they saw an occasional Cossack village of low white houses with green window frames, but the Chinese bank was utterly destitute of human life,—a voiceless wilderness, save for the cry of the cuckoo in the dim shadows of the forest and the mournful howl of the wolf; for the river, though a boundary line, is no barrier, and the dreaded Cossack has a way of going across, and he spares neither man, woman nor child.

And all night the tireless steamer swam up the Amur that ran like a river of ink in the light of the new moon, while the waters whispered and rustled about her sides. Hardy sat up till late and it seemed to him that the stars were dimmer than above the Mississippi, down which he had once traveled, and farther away, adding by their aloofness to the feeling of vastness and loneliness that the country inspired.

Shortly before twelve he went to his cabin, but, hearing a terrific blowing of a whistle, came up on deck again. There was a red eye of light in the far distance and toward that the boat was steering. Nearer approach discovered a bewhiskered muzhik in a long cloak, sitting by a bonfire. He had wood to sell, and soon the crew were filing up a steep path

with their carrying-sticks over their shoulders. Other immense bonfires were lighted, casting a red flaring radiance far over the river, and by this illumination the men brought the wood on board.

They must have taken on a large supply of fuel this time, for they did not stop again till ten o'clock the next day, when an amusing little incident occurred that served Hardy as a revelation of the character of the Russian women in general and of the Princess Romanovna in particular.

Besides the Viennese opera company from Vladivostok, there was on board an enormously fat songstress bound for Irkutsk, where she was to fill an engagement in a vaudeville theater. This woman was one of that numerous class, who, after having become impossible in any other part of the globe through obesity, advanced years, loss of voice, or other cause, go to Siberia and again become the rage.

Madame Augusta Vacco was forty, if a day, and weighed all of two hundred pounds, yet she was shy and kittenish and had with her a chaperon, a little fat old woman in black.

The passengers had, nearly all of them, gone to the woods, as usual, and when the whistle blew they came back, eagerly running, their hands filled with

the glorious flowers of Siberia: wild peonies, tiger-lilies, lilies-of-the-valley and tall lilies of a blood-red hue, great fragrant roses, wild lilac, priceless orchids of several varieties. The Princess came last, walking leisurely, carrying three long tiger-lilies in her hand. The sight of her, and especially her air of imperious nonchalance, in view of the fact that she was keeping the boat waiting, amused Courtland Hardy as he stood there, leaning against the rail and looking down from the high deck. Now that she had smiled at him, he conceded to her the right to keep the boat waiting, though he would have insisted that the concession was rather a tribute to her beauty than to her rank.

The sailors stood ready to pull the plank aboard, the passengers were grumbling in all languages, seemingly, save English, and the fiery little captain, on the bridge, was biting his nether lip and clenching his fists, but did not say a word. He would have been foolish indeed to affront Romanovna, a word from whom could mysteriously deprive him of his position, no matter how efficient he may have proved himself.

She came down the bank leisurely, tall, slender and exquisitely graceful, with a languid air that somehow suggested cultured restraint. Her features,

though noble, yet were of that Slav type, by virtue of which the Russian peasant claims kin with his czar. She was attired in a traveling costume of light blue and a hat of expensive straw, daintily trimmed with corn-flowers, a Paris confection, by the way—one of those simple, effective creations of which no man knoweth the price, whether it be seventy-five cents or seventy-five dollars. Over her left shoulder she twirled carelessly a parasol of brilliant hue, imported from Yokohama.

Directly in front of the Princess puffed frantically the little fat old woman in black. The little old woman stepped upon the plank and teetered timidly up its precarious incline, a comical figure, antiquely coquettish. The Princess stopped about two feet from the shore end, and, smiling demurely, danced on tiptoe, balancing herself by means of the gaudy parasol and the long tiger-lilies. The result, if one could overlook its slight suggestion of cruelty, was highly satisfactory from a comedy standpoint, as the audience on the boat enthusiastically testified. The fat little old lady did not fall off the plank, but her efforts to stay on and the upward speed that she made, despite those efforts, were grotesque in the extreme. She suggested one of those semi-aquatic birds that can not fly, but yet attain great

speed on land by flapping rudimentary wings. Nor was her voluble indignation, expressed in fluent German and bad Russian, when she at last stepped upon the hot metal deck, less diverting. The Romanovna flashed one merry glance, a fleeting vision of white teeth and mischievous blue eyes, at her audience, and then came fearlessly up the plank, again the graceful and haughty aristocrat.

Hardy was sure that her eyes lingered on his for a moment, as though she recognized in him a congenial spirit who could share a joke with her. The sense of humor is the widest free-masonry that the world knows.

The only other incident worth recording happened at night, after all the passengers had retired. A party of hidden marauders fired on the boat, and one of the bullets passed through Hardy's cabin window. That they were Chinese was evident from a war-arrow, with its iron point, that was found sticking to the rail the next morning.

"They are becoming very restless," said Smulders in his broken English, "but they will hardly dare much to do,"—and he pointed to a long line of dusty Cossacks that were trotting along the military road that skirts the Amur. "The river is well guarded, and if they make depredations, the Cossacks take

terrible vengeance. I am glad that they did not harm my Chulia."

Julia was the name of the Viennese singer, with whom Smulders was fast becoming infatuated.

A little way below Blagovestchensk they passed the blackened ruins of Aigun, the once populous Chinese city which the Cossacks had destroyed not very long before.

"They found the bodies of four thousand men, women and children in the ruins," explained Smulders, "and into the river they thousands have driven. That scare the Chinese, but they also not like it much."

"I should think," said Hardy, "that they would be vexed at such treatment, to say the least."

He looked carefully to his rifle and pistol that very day.

CHAPTER XV

UP THE AMUR

The blackened ruins of Aigun and its grisly story of men and women slain in that swoop of the Cossacks, that awful picture of fire, slaughter and rapine, and the thousands trampled by horses, cut down by the sword, or driven to death in the turbid Amur, illustrated, in Hardy's mind, one phase of the advance of Russian civilization; another and more pleasing phase was symbolized by the large white gymnasium of Blagovestchensk, the first building of that progressive modern city that could be seen from the decks of the *Alexsay*.

Several hours were passed in Blagovestchensk, during which Hardy and Smulders tore about in a droshky, and here it was that the former began to get an idea of that growth and commercial activity of which Emery had spoken so enthusiastically; for Blagovestchensk has wide streets and department stores, is lighted by electricity, and is rapidly

growing, as was attested by the large number of new buildings in process of erection.

The imperial mail-steamer, on which they embarked about dark, was a much smaller boat than the *Alexsay*, and of lighter draft. There were only six first-class cabins, all forward, and the poor Princess was obliged to squeeze into three of these, the general taking the other three. Hardy managed to obtain an upper berth in a second-class cabin aft, but was soon driven out of this, as the Russian beneath him smoked some filthy brand of cigarettes all night, lighting them every five minutes with old-fashioned sulphur matches, the acrid fumes of which, mingled with the smoke, arose in stifling clouds to his nostrils and filled the entire cabin. The Russians, much to Hardy's surprise, kept the door and window tightly closed, and, though he arose several times to open one or the other, his fellow passengers immediately shut it again.

He arose at last, dressed and went out on deck, taking his blankets with him. The air was balmy and he soon fell asleep, lulled by the breathing of the engine and the whispering of the waters. But he was not allowed to enjoy his repose long, for about midnight the passengers and the baggage were changed over to another steamer that drew a trifle

less water and was, unfortunately for the comfort of the passengers, all save the Princess and the general, of smaller holding capacity. This new steamer brought down the disquieting rumor that the Amur and the Shilka, which latter river formed the waterway higher up, were rapidly falling.

All night they were engaged at the work by the aid of bonfires, and Hardy was obliged to seize his own trunks and drag them across the decks and help lower them into the small boat. By the glare of the primitive illumination he could see the Romanovna's triumphant and isolated crossing-over and could behold her standing on the deck of the new ship, leaning on the general's arm, watching with amused interest the grand scramble of the less fortunate rabble, to which he now belonged. He was even obliged to sling a great bundle upon his back and drop it into the skiff, fully aware that he loomed as monstrous and clear as Achilles amid the flames of burning Troy, though by no means so heroic. Never in his life did he realize the great gulf fixed between himself and the Princess so keenly as at that crucial moment. There is nothing romantic about a man's soiled linen.

Here, too, they took on a detachment of Bouriat cavalry in faded, dirty and dusty uniforms, return-

ing from some murderous and unrecorded raid into Manchuria. They seemed half Chinese and half North-American Indian, and they swarmed on every available portion of the deck, disposing themselves in compact rows, like sardines in a box.

The ship was off again at dawn, feeling its way cautiously, to avoid the shallow places. There were six first-class cabins on this boat also, Hardy learned, which were given over, as a matter of course, to the Princess and the general. Hardy, being plentifully supplied with money through old Emery's liberality, made an effort to obtain one of these, but his request, preferred through Smulders to the captain, who spoke a little German, was treated with polite surprise. Cabins on steamers, he learned, were obtained in Russia like most other desirable things, through official influence.

As she continued her course for several days, it was necessary for Hardy and Smulders to preempt places on the deck for lying down, for the time comes at last when a man must sleep, and not being provided, like a horse, with four legs, "one on each corner," he finds it necessary to measure his length on something.

The spectacle afforded by the steamer as seen by the light of dawn was most picturesque. The

main body of the passengers, without reference to wealth or social position, were crowded together on an upper deck, beneath an awning. There they seized on places to lay their blankets and slept at night or sat about all day rolling cigarettes, playing cards and gossiping. It was a dappled conglomerate scene, a medley of strange costumes—bright handkerchiefs tied about feminine heads, long boots, blouses, ribbons of Little Russia, Tatars, Bouriats, Germans, French, muzhiks, Jews and one American. From the rafters of the awning hung a most extraordinary assortment of personal belongings,—cavalry sabers, loaves of black bread, bundles of Chinese arrows from Aigun, boots, bottles, tiny samovars, hams, half-eaten fish, gaudy flowers. Every inch, available and unavailable, on roof and floor had been seized. Frederick Courtland Hardy, ex-cotillion leader, occupied a space two feet wide and six long, between the florid-faced, cheerful German and a Bouriat cavalryman.

Smulders was returning to Amsterdam from Port Arthur, whither he had taken out a dredger for a Dutch company. He knew one Russian word, *peevo*, beer, and he descended frequently to the bar on the deck below and yelled, "*Peevo! peevo!*" so loudly that he could be heard all over the ship. The

Bouriat sat patiently for twenty-four hours on a stretch looking at the tips of his long cavalry boots. While sleeping, Hardy turned his face toward the German as the least of the two evils.

Among the other passengers was a tea merchant, who had a cargo from China in the hold, which he was moving across the vast continent for shipment to England; the opera troupe from Vladivostok,—pretty Viennese girls for the most part; exiles whose terms were expired; Europeans looking for mines; noisy students on their way to Moscow.

Smulders and "Chulia" talked together for hours and even sang duets. The girl was coquettish and nearly drove him to desperation, causing him to sigh deeply and exclaim, "I loaf her very heavy, but she will not much, so what can I do? So I think I drink a little,"—whereat he would wade through a sea of heads, plunge down to the bar below and shout, "*Peevo!*"

The incident of the plank and the fat old lady so interested Hardy that he devoted much of his time to watching for the Romanovna to appear on the little first-class deck forward, where, attired in cool, bewitching costumes, she walked up and down, or talked with the general.

He was so downcast that he no longer sought

for the morning smile and the nod, which had been accorded to him during those pleasant days on the *Alexsay*.

The fact that he was traveling third-class made him feel like an emigrant, immeasurably separated from the fair creature over there with the gods. He was in no mood to reflect that the question of funds had not entered into his choice of a third-class passage. Here he was, among the Bourriats and muzhiks, and there was she, the sort of woman he was accustomed to, separated from him by a great gulf.

And patiently the steamer forged ahead through vast stretches of solitude, unutterably lonely, past interminable forests. After many hours they would come to a Cossack village, perched on a bluff, a few square log houses with white window frames. But this was always on the Siberian side, on the right. On the Manchurian bank there was no sign of human habitation or life, for the dread Russian bear stood growling just across the swift, yellow river and the Chinese had taken their families and vanished. From time to time long rafts drifted past, carrying emigrants with their families, their horses and cattle to the land, in this vast solitude, promised them by their father, the czar. Sad, wondering

women sat in the doors of the tiny huts built on the logs, with their children clamoring about their knees, while the men stood at the corners with huge paddles guiding the clumsy craft. The cattle loomed large and monstrous in the uncertain light of the evening or the early dawn, as though they were standing on the water itself. Hardy was saddened by the sight of these people, going they knew not where nor to what, going down stream with no hope of ever coming back.

"Yes," he mused, as he gazed sorrowfully at one of these rafts, "I am a brother to the emigrant and the exile. Poor exile! not gifted to cope with his fellows in the universal battle of greed, too generous to hold fast, like the Jew, to the few pennies which fall into his palm, he is driven forth to the uttermost parts of the earth. Covered wagons carry him to the far Dakotas and the wilds of Assiniboia; he sleeps on the decks of steamers that climb the wide and muddy Amur; he is crowded into the foul holds of great Atlantic liners, and his little children wonder and cry. And ever in his heart there is a dream of a home and of liberty in some promised land, and ever a yearning that will not die for the cottage of his birth and the tongue of his mother's lullabies."

It was necessary now to test the depths of the water constantly. Two men, one on either side of the prow, sounding by means of stakes attached to ropes, swayed rhythmically as they cast their wooden spears, chanting the depths: "*Chetyre, chetyre-polovena, pyat!*" (Four, four and a half, five!) As often as a down-coming steamer passed, the little captain made a trumpet of his hands and shouted across to its commander: "How much water is there in the Shilka?"

The disquieting rumor that the water was rapidly falling was gaining confirmation by each report. Once the men with the poles cried, "*Tres-polovena,*" (three and a half) and the steamer scraped on the bottom. At Pokrovka, a dreary Cossack village near the junction of the Amur and the Shilka rivers, they found a smaller mail boat awaiting them that drew but three feet of water. They changed over again with a multi-lingual hullabaloo and a grand scramble for places, all save the general and the Princess, who moved leisurely into the first-class cabins, like the superior beings they were. Hardy still clung to Smulders as the most promising material for one wall of his sleeping apartment. For the other, by the way, he could not do better than to obtain the smoke-stack. They got off at

noon and were immediately attacked by an immense drove of flies of the size of small bumblebees and having two fierce projecting mandibles, white as ivory and plainly visible. For several hours Hardy forgot the Princess and even his homesickness. Life contained no possible interest save the repelling of these enthusiastic boarders, as the slightest relaxation of vigilance meant a sharp pain and a nasty sore. At night, however, when the great Siberian moon was shining brightly on the long silver ribbon of water and the dim, untenanted solitudes, and the faithful engine was breathing softly, like a huge behemoth swimming up the stream, he found himself wondering whether she could dance, and, if the truth must be known, whether a merchant in Russia had any social standing.

Then he would sigh at the reflection that, in any case, after Stryetensk he should never see her again. The next day they stuck fast on a sand-bank, and a boat's crew carried the anchor far up the river and dropped it, attached to a stout hawser. Then, by means of the windlass, they deliberately warped the steamer loose. At dark of the same day they grounded for good in two and a half feet of water, a few yards below a great tramp steamer firmly imbedded athwart the channel. There was no hope of

going either up or down for many days to
The peasants took the matter philosophically;
would simply live where they were, rent free, by
their bread and milk of the Cossacks. When
saw fit to send water they would go on.

CHAPTER XVI

TO THE RESCUE

But what would the general do, the military governor of Irkutsk? For, as everybody knew, he must be at his post on a certain date, and the White Czar would not be apt to take the will of God into account. Within two days the general's intentions were made manifest, for his orderly arrived with several long dugouts, each having a mast at the prow. A rope, fastened at the stern, was passed through a pulley at the top of the mast and the other end attached to a shaggy horse. The general's baggage was piled into one of these dugouts and he seated himself comfortably in the midst. A muzhik with a paddle occupied the stern, another mounted the horse and they rode off, the animal scrambling over the stones by the shore or splashing through the shallow water, while the man with the paddle kept the boat clear of the bank. This is the ancient mode of ascending Russian rivers,

the method of "*loshat* and *lotka*," and two military stations, or about thirty miles, can thus be made a day under favorable circumstances, by getting under way at four o'clock in the morning.

To Hardy's consternation the Princess and her maid followed in a second dugout. But there were two more waiting on the bank, their owners hoping that others of the passengers would wish to avail themselves of their use.

"Come on," cried Hardy to Smulders. "Let them follow them. It will be a lark."

"A lark? What's that?"

"A lark? Why, fun, sport."

But Smulders sighed and shook his head, thinking of the fair Viennese. "Ah, no," he said, "I do not care if it be an eagle. I can not leave Chulia. Her load is too heavy."

Hardy lost no time. By signs he conveyed to one of the sailors that he wished his luggage carried ashore and piled into a dugout. Soon he, too, was seated in the bottom, reclining gracefully against his impedimenta, his horse scrambling along in the wake of the Princess' *lotka*. It was an exhilarating method of travel, combining novelty with an element of danger productive of excitement. No one tipped over, it is true, but the American considered

a marvel that these narrow pig troughs and their towering piles of baggage should remain upright for a moment. The voluble wrangle that went on, moreover, between the two muzhiks at the extreme ends of the tow-line, and the gurgling of the current rushing past at the rate of six miles an hour, contributed liveliness and even an impression of speed. Sometimes, when the water was shallow, the horses waded a quarter of a mile from the shore, with a wide expanse of yellow river on either hand; and if they came to a deep place, the little animals plunged boldly in, swimming silently, with nothing but their heads and half of the postilions' bodies above water.

They made but one military station the first day—a large square building, where a samovar is kept always ready for travelers and the sledges that carry the mails over the ice in winter. To Hardy's delight the old general and the Princess were extremely courteous to him and made him understand by signs that he was welcome. The general's orderly foraged and produced some black bread, some milk and a quantity of delicious fresh caviar of the kind the Russians do not export.

The Princess presided charmingly at the samovar, after which she disappeared for the night. Hardy spread his blankets on the floor and was soon

fast asleep. But he seemed no sooner to have closed his eyes than he was awakened again by the voice of the general shouting at him in Russian.

It was only three o'clock, but the place was all a-bustle with preparations for departure. Ere the mists had risen from the river they were again under way, dim as ghosts. Hardy reclined against his luggage and slept deliciously until the sun arose, when he was awakened by the stinging of a cloud of gnats. Sitting upright, he noticed that the *lotka* of the Princess was deserted by its fair passenger. Casting his eyes about, he observed maid and mistress strolling along the government road that follows the course of the Shilka and that serves as a channel for the stream of Cossacks that pours into Manchuria. The bank was high at this point and the women were above him, plainly visible in the bright sun. The Romanovna, twirling her Japanese parasol on her shoulder, walked rapidly and with a joyous freedom of motion that testified to her love of the open air.

"I wonder if she plays golf," mused Hardy, and at that very moment he perceived that he, too, was cramped, sitting there in the boat. He got out, accordingly, and struck vigorously across a wide stretch of sand deposited during high water. He

some fifteen minutes climbing the steep bank, when he at last reached the road, the Princess no where to be seen. Indeed, the road at this t turned sharply away from the river and disappeared around the foot of a hill. Hardy knew, however, that it must wind back to the river, and he before followed the wide dusty trail confidently, though it seemed to plunge into the heart of the wilderness. Once or twice he asked himself why he was walking so rapidly, and each time made answer: "Why, to keep up with my *lotka*, of course." He was too thorough a gentleman to admit to himself that he was pursuing the Princess; he would not have done such a thing on Beacon Street; why should he do it on a government road in Siberia? In any rate, it would be an indiscreet thing to do, and he would be sure to crush him for his presumption. But he certainly had just as good a right to go out and walk as she. As he was soliloquizing and had almost come to the conclusion that he was in a fair way at last of making an ass of himself, he thought he heard a shrill scream in the distance. Listening, with his heart in his mouth, he was sure, for the first cry was followed by others,—and, despairing shrieks, as of a woman in the most agonizing fear.

“Coming! coming!” shouted Hardy, and, feeling in his pocket for the general’s American pistol which, thank God! was there, he ran as he never ran before. Rounding a little turn in the road and a clump of trees, he came suddenly on a sight that thrilled him with rage and sickened him with fear, not for himself, but for the Princess. There she was, struggling in the arms of a big Chinese, one of that half-savage tribe that inhabits the wild regions of Manchuria. The beast had lifted her in his arms and was running toward the woods with her, while another carried the maid. Two other Mongolians, with long war bows in their hands, completed the strange picture. Hardy shouted again, and the four Chinese wheeled about and regarded him with startled malignancy that turned on the instant to amusement.

Those four great brutes beheld one rather small, dark man, of dapper appearance, despite his week’s river-travel,—a slender, dark man in a blue serge suit and negligée shirt, who mechanically adjusted his gold pince-nez as he advanced now at a slower gait. The two Chinese with war bows fitted long arrows to the strings and, with a sudden lift of the left foot and a widening of the arms, they let drive. One arrow whizzed by Hardy’s head and the other



She was struggling in the arms of a big Chinese *Page 146*

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pierced his clothing, making a nasty scratch on his left side. Then the pistol cracked twice and the two Chinese fell sprawling, with bullets through their bodies. The other two promptly dropped the fainting women and started to run. Hardy aimed deliberately at the one who had seized the Princess and fired. It was a long shot, but the bullet took effect, as a scream of pain testified.

Neither the Princess nor the maid evinced any signs of reviving, but lay there huddled on the ground as though dead. Hardy ran to the edge of the bluff and there, as good fortune would have it, was the general's *lotka*, and the general himself strolling along leisurely on the sand. The American shouted so loudly and flung his arms about so wildly that the orderly, the two muzhiks and even the governor himself were soon scrambling up the steep bank toward him. The Romanovna had revived by the time they all reached her, and sat in the tall grass putting up her abundant hair, woman fashion, and looking about with awakening eyes. She was as pale as a ghost and held out her hands appealingly. Hardy and the general helped her to her feet, and it was the American who supported her until her trembling limbs regained their strength. The general surveyed the dead Chinese, and then,

standing squarely in front of Hardy, removed his cap and made a low bow.

At the next station they found a small government boat, the *Pushkin*, awaiting them, that drew only one foot of water. It had been sent down by the authorities to pick up the general, and Courtland Hardy, ex-cotillion leader, was taken on board and one of the four cabins was given to him, although one of the greatest heiresses in all Russia was thereby compelled to occupy a room with her maid.

CHAPTER XVII

WOMAN'S GRATITUDE

The Princess was sitting on one of the benches of the upper deck, attired in the costume of Little Russia, with the Japanese parasol turned toward the sun, over her shoulder. Hardy had rather avoided her since the incident of the brigands, as he felt that any attempt at friendship on his part would be taking advantage of the service he had been able to render her,—a service which, he assured himself, he would have performed just as eagerly for the humblest peasant woman on the boat. The Romanovna, in fact, had been nearly prostrated since that dreadful happening, remaining in her cabin until now, under the care of her maid.

"Monsieur," she said to Hardy, who was promenading the little deck. He threw away his cigar, removed his hat and bowed very low. He noticed that she was still pale and that her eyes looked unnaturally large. "*Parlez-vous francais, Monsieur?*" she asked sweetly, with a perfect Parisian accent.

"*Un peu, Madame,*" he replied, "but unfortunately, very badly."

"Ah, but you do speak it!" she cried with animation, "you speak it well, or at least well enough to enable me to express to you my undying gratitude. I owe you my life, Monsieur! Pray, sit down here beside me. I owe you my escape from a horrible, hideous fate."

Hardy sat beside her on the bench.

"You owe me nothing, Madame," he said; "there was no great danger for me, really. The—the obligation is all on my side. There is not a muzhik or Bouriat on the boat who would not have done the same thing. They are all envious of my great good fortune."

"I owe you, nevertheless, my life," she insisted "and you have my undying gratitude, as I said. I do not know how I shall ever be able to repay you!"

Hardy frowned.

"I did not do it with any thought of repayment of any kind, Madame," he said. "You will be recompensed if you will dismiss all thought of obligation. It would pain me to think that I had imposed any such imaginary burden on you. I am more than repaid in my own satisfaction. I trust you are quite recovered from the shock."

"But, you were wounded! The general tells me that you were wounded. Do not deny it!" she commanded, smiling. "The entire boat knows of it. It is fortunate the arrow was not poisoned."

"Not wounded," replied Hardy, "merely scratched."

The Princess fixed her eyes on him for several moments.

"I have always insisted," she murmured, "that the American gentlemen compare favorably with those of any country in the world, and now I know it. Pray do me the honor to sit here and talk with me a while. We will change the subject, if you desire. How do you like our Russia?"

Hardy talked with her for an hour or so. She spoke slowly and distinctly for him, and he found, under such delightful auspices, his French was a much more practical and useful acquirement than he had thought. They talked of the increasing activity of the Chinese marauders, of the possibility of war with Japan, of the wild flowers of Siberia, of Russian and American society. He found her intensely patriotic, and firm in the belief that Russia could crush Japan in a month, should hostilities actually break out.

As they were thus engaged in conversation the

general approached, and, bowing before the Princess, proposed *zakouska* to Hardy.

"Ah, Monsieur," she laughed, "do you know the great Russian institution of *zakouska*?"

"Yes," he replied, "it was about the first Russian word I learned, and I have heard it more frequently than any other since."

"Then," she said, rising and taking the general's arm, "we will have *zakouska* in my cabin. Will you do us the honor of joining us?"

"Certainly," replied Hardy with alacrity. "I find it a most delightful custom!"

And all day long they steamed up the winding and yellow Amur, through virgin solitudes of rolling prairie, through interminable stretches of primeval forest, with medieval Russia on the right and ancient, prehistoric China on the left.

That evening Hardy watched a glorious sunset with the Princess, glancing furtively now and then at the rapt, beautiful face, the great blue eyes dilated, the pretty mouth slightly opened with wonder. The sun was hidden behind a pile of dark clouds banked against the west. Below these and the horizon line was a wide ribbon of bright saffron into which the disk suddenly dropped, a ball of changing radiance, dull gold, burnished copper, glowing orange. Just

as it disappeared, it became a conflagration, the flames of which flared out, leaving the clouds rolling up as smoke. The saffron ribbon was now edged with a narrow strip of gleaming quicksilver, the clouds at the left glowed with indescribable beauties of purple and orange, while those banked above gleamed through their rifts with such fires as burn in the transparencies of an opal. The Princess sighed and her eyes sought those of the American, and thus those two stood for a moment, looking at each other in silence.

"I think," she said at last, "that there are no such gorgeous sunsets any where in the world as here on our Amur. *N'est ce pas, Monsieur?*"

"This is certainly the most beautiful I have ever seen," he replied with conviction.

But though the sun had set, the light did not fade from the sky, and at nine o'clock the people on the steamer could read without difficulty. And now the river itself became a ribbon of lilac laid fluttering on the dark green of the fields,—a ribbon of lilac that slowly faded, while the delicious aroma of millions of wild flowers, mingling their fragrant breaths on the evening breeze, was distinctly perceptible.

The hills sloped abruptly to the water's edge, and

their pine-covered sides were sharply reflected in the river below.

The grinding and jarring of the little steamer on the sand was now a matter of hourly occurrence. Occasionally a large river boat would be passed, high-founded and dry, either deserted or occupied by a few passengers, patiently waiting for the water to rise. Many rowboats drifted by, laden with more fortunate people, going with the swift current rather than against it. To these the captain shouted continually:

“How is the water in the Shilka?” And ever came the same reply,

“Falling, slowly falling.”

At midnight they ran upon a sand-bank and had such difficulty getting off that Hardy thought they were stuck for good. It was necessary to wake up the passengers, with the exception of her Highness the Princess, and drive them all over to one side of the boat, to list her. After an hour of most exciting work, during which the captain dashed forward and back on the bridge, gesticulating with his entire body and shouting like a madman, they got off and were under way again, only to make another hour's stop for wood. This time, as before, a bewhiskered muzhik was sitting on the bank by a flaring fire

He could be seen very distinctly from a great distance, and as the steamer approached, the officer in command shouted at him again and again. The soundness with which he was sleeping, with head upon breast and arms folded upon knees, gave rise to considerable amusement among such of the passengers as were awake. The plank was laid and several of the crew ran up to him. One of them pushed him and he sprawled over.

"He's dead!" announced the sailor.

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir; transfixed by an arrow."

He put his foot upon the man's breast and, seizing something, pulled. A moment later he held up in the light of the bonfire a Chinese war arrow; then, throwing it to the earth, he stooped and wiped his hand upon the grass.

Toward morning they stuck on the sand again, in a wide part of the river, with dense forests on either bank. The steamer drifted about and blocked up a narrow channel through which they were attempting to pass. The sand came level with the surface of the water on either hand. The captain tried in vain all the expedients known on the Amur: he attempted to lift the boat around by means of a mast planted at her side in the river; he

sent the anchor up stream and essayed to drag her through bodily, by means of the windlass; he added to this power the pulling force of a wooden windlass, set up on one bank of the river, whose long cross-bar was manned by half the boat's crew, but without success.

"What is the matter?" the Princess, coming out on the deck about nine o'clock in the morning, asked Hardy.

"We are stuck for good," explained the American. "I hope you slept well?"

"Excellently, thank you! But I hope we are not stranded, as I have invited some friends to a house party at my country place near Moscow."

A rowboat drifted into the mouth of the channel and lodged against the side of the steamer. It contained four dead, one of whom was a priest in long robes. He was lying flat on his back, with his head lolling horribly over the side, his venerable beard floating on the water. All were pierced with arrows. The general offered the Princess his arm and conducted her below.

"*Zakouska?*" he said, patting her hand.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EXCHANGE OF COMPLIMENTS

The method of *loshat* and *lotka* was out of the question now, even for General Catkoff. The wild bandits of Manchuria, who respect no government on earth, and whose only patriotic sentiment consists in the fact that they would rather kill a Russian than any other "foreign devil," were aroused and were thirsting for loot and vengeance. It would be courting death to go up that river unless escorted by a troop of cavalry. Moreover, it was the duty of every man about the boat to remain by the Princess' side. Reinforcements were sure to arrive in the shape of muzhiks or Bouriats, who, impatient of remaining on the stranded steamer below, had pushed on afoot or by *lotka*. There was always the chance, too, that a squad of Cossack cavalymen might come along, following the military road, a long stretch of which was visible from the boat, between the skirts of the forest and the edge of the river.

In addition to Hardy and the general and the captain, there were on board five members of the crew. Weapons could be provided for all of these. The captain took a hurried inventory and found that, with economy, there was enough food to last all hands five days. As the first day wore on, an occasional horseman could be seen on the Manchurian side, in the dim foreground of the forest. These horsemen appeared singly at first, then in twos, and finally in groups of three or four. They were evidently increasing in numbers and collecting in the vicinity of the stranded steamer. Toward evening Smulders and his "Chulia" came along. The German had persuaded the Viennese to embark with him in a *lotka* and they had made nearly as great progress as the steamer, with its frequent delays on account of the sand-banks and the necessity of taking on wood. They had come on, perfectly unconscious of danger, and probably owed their immunity to the fact that they had stuck close to the Siberian side, to which the Chinese did not often cross.

"We will stay here," declared Smulders, when Hardy explained to him the danger of continuing the journey, "and I will fight for my Chulia till I die."

"How is your suit coming on?" asked Hardy,

smiling. "She must like you pretty well, or she would not come up the river with you."

"Ah, she would have come up mit a Russian, so I come along mit the only *lotka* and she have to come mit me. She vill not much and I have no *peevo*, so I think I go mad. Ach, I loaf her very heavy!"

Nothing happened that night, save the arrival of four Bouriards, riding by turns a very tired and incredibly bony horse. After a shouted conversation with the captain, two of them mounted the animal and rode out to the boat. They were armed with short rifles and heavy cavalry swords. They turned the horse loose, which swam to shore, and was used by the other two as a living ferry, one riding this time, while his comrade held fast to the animal's tail.

In the morning six Manchurians rode down to the water's edge and began firing at the boat. The distance was long and they shot wildly, not putting Hardy and his friends in any great danger, though they made their intentions perfectly plain. The Princess Romanovna, attired in the gown of light blue and the hat trimmed with blue flowers, stood by the general's side, eying the scene with calm interest, twirling her open parasol carelessly on her shoulder.

"I think you had better go below, Madame," said Hardy, "a stray shot might hit you."

"There is no danger," she replied, "they can not hit the boat and they are great cowards,—they dare not come nearer. If you could wound one of them they would all run away."

Hardy glanced at her admiringly.

"The range is too long," he replied, fingering his rifle affectionately and familiarly. "If they would come a little closer, now, we might teach them a lesson. That big fellow, riding up and down before them, seems to be the leader."

"Don't you think you could hit him?" she asked. "I have great faith in your marksmanship, very naturally."

"Not at this distance, and I find no amusement in shooting unless I am pretty sure of my mark."

As they stood looking, reinforcements to the Chinese arrived from time to time. Other horsemen rode out from the depths of the woods, till, in the course of an hour, the strength of the company had increased from six to twenty. Hardy became convinced that the Chinese intended to attack, when their numbers should become sufficiently great, and here, by a strange freak of chance he found himself actively involved in the ancient and unending war.

between Russia and Asia,—mixed up in a fight to the death, which was as much his fight as it was the captain's or the general's, or that of any sailor or Bouriat on board. For it was his duty to defend, to the last drop of blood in his body and with all his remarkable skill, the fair, imperious, high-spirited lady who stood by his side. And, even though he was face to face with desperate danger, perhaps with a horrible death, he felt a fierce joy in being there. He did not know whether or not she knew he was a tradesman, a mere hireling who was scarcely better than a clerk. He had not told her, and he did not care. At Stryetensk he would begin that life. Now, and till then, he was her knight-errant, and she should not be ashamed of him.

“Will you,” he said to the Princess, “convey a slight suggestion to the general for me? I make it in all humility.”

She looked at him inquiringly as he explained. As a result, some of the men were set to work dragging up mattresses and bedding and piling them against the rail to form a barricade. This work was not more than half completed when the brigands made their first attack. Emboldened by the accession of half a dozen recruits, they deployed in a long line, and, swinging their rifles about their heads, they

came galloping on through the shallow water of the river, the chief well in advance. The general gave a quick sharp order and his little army fell on their knees behind the half-finished barricade, on the top of which they rested their rifles.

Evidently, being a good soldier, he had ordered the men not to fire till the enemy should get close. Smulders had no rifle, but he seized a stout boat-hook, shod with a sharp iron point, and sank on his knees shouting:

“They shall never get my Chulia!”

On came the wild line, splashing through the water, which was now up to the horses' knees. When they had traversed about one-third of the distance, they stopped and deliberately took aim. The general spoke sharply to the Princess, who sat down on the deck behind the barricade. At this moment the brigands fired and several of the bullets passed over the boat and splashed in the water on the farther side. One struck the smoke-stack with a “pluff,” and another, evidently flattened by its impact with the water, hummed musically. The old general stood erect, without flinching, repeating some order to his men. His voice sounded affectionate, almost caressing.

Hardy raised his rifle and measured the distance.

"What does he say?" he asked of the Princess, kneeling by her.

"Not yet, my children, not yet!"

"Now," said the American, "you can do something for me, if you will; I think I can hit the chief now. Ask the general, as a special favor to you, to let me try!"

The Manchurians sat silent upon their horses, shading their eyes with their hands, to see, if possible, the result of their volley. The Princess ran to the general and spoke hurriedly to him, and the latter turned and nodded at Hardy. The American adjusted his pince-nez and raised his rifle to his shoulder. It was a long shot, but he had done better in the Adirondacks at deer. His nerves were good and his muscles as tense as steel. Just as he was about to press the trigger, the chief swung his rifle about his head, pointed at the boat and came plunging on again. It was a more difficult matter now, as the man was in motion. Yet he was a splendid mark, looming big and dark there against the bright water, with a dash or two of vivid color about him, evidently ribbons or a sash.

Hardy shot and the chief still came on, followed by his men, shouting like wild Indians, in their barbaric tongue.

The American shot again without result.

Then he swore softly, a good, honest Saxon oath, removed his eye-glasses, wiped his eyes with his handkerchief, replaced his glasses, laid his cheek on his weapon and shot a third time. The chief's rifle dropped into the yellow Amur, his arms fell to his side, and he plunged over his horse's flank, head-first into the water. The animal whirled about and charged on the line behind him, dragging his rider's body, which hung by one stirrup. The other brigands turned and followed their leader's body to the bank and disappeared into the dark Manchurian woods.

The Princess approached Hardy and extended her hand.

"I congratulate you again, Monsieur," she said, "on your splendid marksmanship."

"I take your hand, Madame," he replied, "but I can not accept the congratulations. It was very bad shooting. My only excuse is that this is the first time I have used this rifle."

Smulders dropped his boat-hook to the deck, and, running up to the American, seized both his hands in his fat, pink palms.

"You have saved my Chulia!" he sobbed.

There was, indeed, no further attack on the part of

the Chinese that afternoon, and at night, before the moon arose, the besieged received an important recruit. A man heard shouting from the Russian side was allowed to approach and come on board. Hardy could not see his face, as lights were not allowed on deck, but he thought he recognized the voice, even though it was speaking Russian. The new-comer went below immediately. Half an hour after his arrival, Hardy was summoned by the Princess to her cabin.

"Mr. Hardy," she said in French, "this is my cousin, Boris Romanoff. I take pleasure in introducing two brave men to each other. Mr. Hardy has saved my life, and Boris has braved the most fearful dangers to reach my side. When he arrived at Vladivostok, and inquired for me, he learned that I had started for Moscow, so he did not wait a moment, but fairly flew up the river. Had he known what gallant defenders were already by my side, he would not have felt such anxiety."

Hardy took this last remark as simply complimentary to himself and the brave old general, and he acknowledged it by a polite bow; how could he know that Boris Romanoff was a suitor for his fair cousin's hand, who was a cousin far removed, after all, and that the Princess often tried the big fellow's

temper in the most insidious and seemingly innocent ways.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Hardy," said Romanoff in English, extending his hand, "I hardly hoped to meet you again in Russia. I feared you would not be able to break away from the fascinations of the geisha girls, who so strongly appealed to you." Hardy ignored the hand.

"I believe that you played a scoundrelly trick on me in Japan," he said, looking Romanoff coolly in the eye and speaking with great calmness, "but I am content, for the present, to pass it by. I—ah—suppose you have your own code as a gentleman. According to mine, it is our duty now to sink all private differences and unite in the rescue of this lady from a most perilous position."

"You are right," replied Romanoff, becoming insolent; "an addition to the crew is not to be despised at a time like this, especially a fellow who can shoot as you can. You ought to open a gallery in Petersburg. You'd make your fortune." He turned his back rudely, but looked over his shoulder to add: "But let us have no misunderstanding. Nothing you can do here will prevent my finding out why the Japanese were so friendly to you and what you are really doing in Russia."

CHAPTER XIX

BURNING ARROWS

On deck all was silence, save for the whispering, bubbling and plashing of the treacherous Amur, or the occasional cry of some lone water-fowl, high overhead, following the course of the river. Hardy, coming above after his interview with Romanoff, found the general on watch. Two of the men also were awake, and were listening and peering into the darkness with a vigilance that proved that they understood that their own lives as well as the lives of all on board, depended on their alertness. The American also listened and watched, straining his eyes to see if, here and there in the darkness, darker forms could be seen of the foe stealthily approaching. Often, as he thus gazed, he was tricked by illusion and seemed to see a hideous Mongolian face leering up from the surface of the river close by. Once or twice he raised his rifle, as if to fire; but, even as he did so, the inky blackness of the

water would wash out the lying yellow patch with its evil eyes.

Then, too, it was easy to hear, in imagination the splashing of feet and of swimming or wading bodies among the infinite sounds of the broad river as it fretted about the points of sand-bars, washed over shallows, or gurgled rapidly through deep channels.

The American needed no one to tell him and experience in warfare to make him understand that this was a most critical moment in the fortunes of the little party. Should the Chinese attack now they would experience no difficulty in getting quite close to the boat, without detection, and, if they came in sufficient force, they would be able to swing over her side and overpower her few defenders.

And as this thought entered his head, he realized that he was listening for another sound, a sound that would fill him with joy,—the beating of horse hoofs on the military road skirting the Siberian bank, and the faint jingling of steel accoutrements.

Yes, the dreaded Cossack, the Cossack terrible and murderous, had become a friend and brother and would have been welcomed by this American joyfully as were the Campbells at Lucknow.

But not even illusion brought any such pleasure

sounds to his ears. Hardy had not been standing on the deck more than twenty minutes, when he felt a hand laid lightly upon his arm. It was so dark that he could not distinguish the outline of the form standing by his side, but he knew, without looking around, that this was the Princess.

"We must not speak loud," she whispered, "the general has commanded absolute silence." He could feel her warm breath on his cheek and her hair brushed his brow. "I came to say that you must not mind my cousin. I saw at a glance that he does not like you, and I think I understand the reason."

"What possible reason could he have for not liking me?" asked Hardy. "I assure you I never did him any intentional harm."

"He is very brave, is my poor cousin, and he is furious that it was you and not he who saved my life from the brigands. Bear with him, I beg of you. He will come to his senses in a day or two and will himself thank you."

"For your sake," whispered Hardy, "I will endure anything from him, at least until we have rescued you from this danger."

A small hand crept down his arm, found his hand, and pressed it.

"*Merci, mon ami!*" whispered the Princess.

At that moment a splash was heard by the side of the boat.

“Go below!” said Hardy in a voice of command—the voice that a real woman likes to hear sometimes from a real man; and he stepped lightly to the spot. He could see nothing, could hear nothing more, but he found the general standing at the place, which was on the down-stream side, gazing into the water. For a moment Hardy had confidently expected to see a throng of Chinese climbing up the sides. If this splash had indicated the arrival of the enemy, however, there was nothing in the general’s demeanor to betray the fact. He did not move, did not awake the sleeping crew, but turned with a sigh and crossed the deck. He was stopped by the Princess, who walked with him for a few seconds.

“He has sent one of the crew, Stenka Pugacheff, down the river for help,” she said to Hardy. “Brave Stenka! He hopes to get far enough in the darkness to escape the eyes of the band which is collected here, and then he will take to the woods. Is he not a hero, this simple Cossack? It is thirty versts to the military station, and there is death waiting for him at every step.”

“Their devotion to you makes them all heroes, Madame,” replied Hardy.

"Ah, no! His devotion to his czar and his fatherland. He left a message for his sweetheart, Katinka Barsova, of the village of Kumanskaya. Would that I had known he was going! If anything happens to him, his sweetheart shall never know what while I live. That thought might have comforted him."

Hardy made no reply, but stood silent, watching and listening. He even moved a few steps away from the Princess, fearing that, by talking to her, instead of keeping guard, he might be imperiling her life. After a few moments, she came to his side again, whispering:

"Had you not better go below and sleep while you can? I can watch as well and you will want to be strong, if there is fighting to be done. My cousin is sleeping; he could no longer keep awake. He had not closed his eyes for four days. Ah, blessed Virgin! What is that?"

A light flashed and went out thirty or forty yards below, and immediately a blazing object described an arc through the air and fell on the deck not far from their feet. One glance was enough to show that the object was an arrow which, freighted with some highly inflammable material, was sticking upright in the deck and burning like a candle. It cast considerable light. Hardy leaped to snatch it, but,

ere he reached it, one of the Cossack soldiers anticipated him and threw the blazing missile into the river. Just as he was in the act of seizing it, several shots rang out and the man was slightly wounded in the arm, as was discovered later,—for the brave fellow made no outcry at the time. The general sprang to the Princess' side, took her by the arm and turned her toward the gangway, speaking kindly but firmly to her.

"Da, da!" she replied, and left the deck.

This first arrow was but the precursor of a shower of twenty or more, the majority of which either passed far over the vessel or fell short, thus proving that the accuracy of the first shot had been largely the result of a lucky guess. Even a boat, though it be a big mark, is a hard thing to hit in the dark. And this flight of arrows established one thing, namely: the Chinese were attacking from only two sides, from below and from Manchuria. The water, indeed, was too deep above and on the Siberian side for them to approach by wading. The entire band of defenders was on the alert now, and the general was giving orders that Hardy, of course, could not understand.

One of the arrows stuck fast in the rail and a sailor broke it off by striking it with a long pole.

The rifle volley of which it was the precursor did no damage, as most of the Russians were either lying on their stomachs, or were crouching behind the improvised bulwarks. There were evidently about twenty Chinese shooting arrows, accompanied by from six to ten riflemen. If they were trying to set fire to the boat, or merely to light it up so that they might pot at its occupants from the safety of the darkness, it soon became evident that their scheme was not destined to prove highly successful. The men, for one thing, made themselves plainly visible for an instant or so while they were scratching their matches and applying the burning arrows to the string.

They kept shooting now, sporadically. First here and there and then in some other spot a red, fitful light would gleam for an instant, dyeing a patch in the river blood-red by its radiance, and revealing a wild, savage-looking Mongolian, armed with great bow and quiver, who flickered into view for a moment and as soon was swallowed up again by darkness.

Hardy, not understanding the general's orders, reasoned that he would be pardoned for acting under his own. If he were going wrong, he reflected, it would be easy to stop him. He therefore held his

rifle ready for action, as a man who is expecting a covey of quail to rise, and stood watching the water alert, tense, keen as a cat about to spring. His chance came soon, when one of those lights flashed nearly in the direction of his gaze and not far away. He threw the gun to his shoulder and fired. He could not see the sights, but he could make out the object plainly, and he knew he should not go wrong. He missed, for the Chinese, standing about waist-deep in the water, fitted the arrow to string and discharged it. The shot rang out loud and clear. It seemed to Hardy that he had never heard a rifle make such a loud report before. The general exclaimed:

“Monsieur Hardy, ah!” and made no further comment, so the American continued his shooting once, twice, three times. Meanwhile the attack party seemed to be approaching a little nearer, and they succeeded in lodging several of their burning missiles in the woodwork of the boat: one arrow in the rail, two in the side of the wheel-house, and one in the hull. These were broken off almost as soon as they stuck and did no damage, for, strange to say, the Chinese themselves had ceased firing their rifles.

And now Hardy had the inexpressible joy of 1

ing one of the attacking party, who fell backward into the water with his blazing arrow in his hand.

"I'm getting the knack of it," he muttered; "I shall be able to do it more frequently now. Perhaps I, alone, can stop them."

A moment later he heard sudden shouting, the sound of running feet, snarls of rage and the splash of heavy bodies falling into the water. A party of Chinese, that had crept down from above in row-boats, was attempting to board, and the Bourriats and crew were repelling them savagely with bayonets and swords.

CHAPTER XX

BATTLE BY MOONLIGHT

The burning arrows had been a diversion, as the books on tactics say, to draw the attention of the little band of defenders and occupy it completely on the down-stream side, while another attacking party crept up under cover of darkness and boarded from above. But for the fact that the wily old general, fearing the trick, had kept a guard stationed at that side, the ruse might have succeeded perfectly. The boat, as we have seen, was swung diagonally across a sort of channel, her nose and stern being imbedded in sand-banks. The Chinese, coming down stream in three rowboats, struck her at either end and near the middle, their evident intention being to spread the Russians out as much as possible.

At this moment a frayed and worn old moon floated up out of the Siberian forest. Hardy saw, by its light, a wide expanse of water, dimly shining between ghostly forests; he saw several Mongolian

heads, covered with round black caps, looking over the side of the boat; he saw Julius Smulders whirl a heavy oak pole in the air and bring it down on one of these heads with terrific force; he saw one of the Bouriats cleave another head so completely that one-half stood erect for a second, while the other fell over the victim's shoulder, as the Bouriat wrenched at his sword, which was imbedded in the rail; he saw a gigantic Manchurian, with a long two-handed sword, leap aboard, to be thrust through by a bayonet lunge just as his feet struck the deck.

All this the American took in with one glance of the eye, just as the moon rose above the woods.

There were four of the crew, besides the captain, all armed with rifles to which bayonets had been affixed by the general's order. Add to these Smulders, the general himself, Hardy and three Bouriats, and the defending party consisted of eleven members. Brave Stenka Pugacheff, of the crew, had gone down the river for help, and the attack had been delivered so suddenly that there was no time to call Romanoff, who was sleeping below. Indeed, it is doubtful if, at that moment of extreme excitement, anybody thought of him.

The Chinese were receiving a murderous and

unlooked-for reception, but they were not to be easily beaten off. Several of them gained the deck and began to swing their clumsy, two-handed swords, and the clash of steel on steel rang out amid savage grunts, snarls and cries of rage. The Cossack crew and the Bouriats fought like devils, leaping and darting about with the agility of wildcats and handling their more modern weapons with murderous dexterity and skill.

A man never knows what sort of man he is till a supreme trial comes to him. The American found himself cool. His faculties were all at a state of extremest tension, with the result that he could see and hear better, think faster and decide more quickly than in ordinary moments. He took his revolver from his pocket and ran lightly toward a Manchurian who was just throwing one leg over the rail. He fired at the head of the man who fell back into the water with a loud splash, dropping his sword on the deck. Another leaped over the rail almost at his side, and, swinging his great steel blade high in the air, chopped at Hardy's head. The latter threw up his rifle and received the blow on the barrel. The impact brought him to his knees, but, as he sank, he shot his assailant beneath the chin, killing him instantly.

At this moment a blazing arrow passed over him and stuck in one of the cotton-stuffed pillows that had been used as a barricade. Hardy snatched the pillow, threw it overboard and ran to the downstream side of the boat. The attack of the boarders had not lasted in all over four or five minutes, and yet in that time several of the wading party had approached considerably nearer. The moon gave sufficient light for him to see the sights of his rifle now and the dark forms of the Chinese made conspicuous marks in the gleaming water. This was not over two or three inches deep on the sand in which the prow of the boat was imbedded, and two of the Chinese were running close in. Hardy killed them both with his rifle and then began to shoot deliberately at those who were farther away, with such effect that he put the entire party to flight ere the ten remaining shots in his weapon were exhausted.

He turned to reënter the *mêlée* just in time to see Boris Romanoff burst raging on deck, wrench a two-handed sword from the fingers of a dead Chinese and ply it with as much ease and skill as though it were the lightest of rapiers. The attackers were gaining ground. Enough of them had come over the side to defend a portion of the rail, over which others were rapidly scrambling, while several of

their number were keeping the defending party busy that they could not use their guns to shoot them down; which, indeed, they would not have been likely to do, in any case, as Cossacks and Bourias are primitive fighters who do not think of shooting when brought to close quarters. Boris Romanov charged with such deadly skill that the boarder leaped over the side, back into the water, leaving two of their number dead. The other brigand followed their comrades, with the exception of one, who was bayoneted in the back just as I jumped; the rifle-barrel, striking the rail, made fulcrum of it, so that the weapon was wrenching from the owner's hands.

The Russians now used their guns, shooting at fifteen or twelve Chinese who were scampering over the sand-bars; but they were ordinary shots, and in all this fusillade, not one bullet took effect. The general soon stopped them, evidently not wishing them to waste their ammunition. And now all was silence again, save for the rippling, plashing and whispering of the mighty Amur, as it rushed on between its dark forests, in the light of the wan moon. A dead body, swept past the stern of the boat by the current, rolled over the sand-bar and floated down stream, and the American, as it caught the

eye, shuddered and thought of the citizens of Aigun, and the thousands of Chinese who had been driven into the same river by the Cossacks. How many gruesome tales could the Amur tell, could its whisperings be understood; how often have its waters been dyed with blood; what a ghastly procession of corpses has it carried seaward on its bosom!

Now that the fight was over, Hardy experienced a feeling of revulsion, as he looked at the corpses lying about the deck in all the abandon of violent death. The slaughter had been necessary, the defense had been gallant, but he was disgusted and sickened by the physical results of it. He was horrified to find that he was standing in blood, which, he noticed, fairly covered the deck and was running into the scuppers. He was glad when the crew began to seize the bodies by cues and feet and cast them overboard. There were eight of them on board, besides one that hung limply over the rail. The Russians were laughing gaily now, and they counted "*Odeen, tvah, tra!*" (One, two, three!) as they swung the dead bodies with a will before pitching them. They struck in the water with tremendous splashes.

And now a thing happened that made Hardy glad that he had not taken Boris Romanoff's hand.

One of the Chinese was not dead, but had been stunned by a blow on the head with a pole. He sprang up and looked about him, dazed, when Romanoff kicked him in the face, knocking him backward, and snatching a gun from one of the Bourriats, pinned the man writhing to the deck. So firmly was the steel blade imbedded in the planking, that the combined efforts of two men were needed to pull it out again.

The fight was over. There was no further danger of the Chinese returning to the attack that night if at all. They had been taught a terrible lesson, though with considerable cost, it must be confessed to the defenders. One of the Bourriats was decapitated deeply at the base of the neck from a blow with a two-handed sword, while Smulders was wounded in the head by a gash that caused the blood to flow over his cheek. His clothing was copiously stained. Romanoff, it was found, too, had received a thrust in the leg, of which he made light, but which was bleeding profusely. The general ordered him below.

While the men were washing down the deck Hardy went into the passage leading to the cabin. He wished to reload his rifle, and possibly get a little sleep. He wondered how the Princess had fared during these terrible moments of uproar and carnage.

Her cabin door was open and he saw her within, comforting her maid and Smulders' Julia, both of whom were in hysterics. The two girls, clasped in each other's arms, were lying on a berth, with a blanket drawn over their heads, sobbing and praying.

"We have driven them off, Madame," announced Hardy. "I think there is no further cause of apprehension at present." The Princess, leaning over the girls, pulled the blanket from their heads, and made them understand that the enemy had fled. They sat up, disheveled, tear-stained, white as ghosts, and, both being Catholics, began to cross themselves and mutter thanks to the Virgin. The Romanovna advanced to Hardy and offered him her hand.

"I had no fears of the result," she said simply, "with such heroes on board." Her face was pale, but it flushed and her eyes flashed as she cried: "Oh, why am I not a man, that I might have helped you?"

"You have helped us a thousand times more by giving us such a cause to fight for," replied Hardy earnestly.

"You are good at making pretty speeches to women," said a sneering voice behind him. "I must tell her Highness of the effect which they produced in Japan."

Hardy turned and beheld Boris Romanoff towering in the passage behind him.

"But he is wounded, my brave Boris!" cried the Princess, as Romanoff entered the room, limping painfully. As the Princess sprang anxiously to her cousin's side and assisted him to a couch, Hardy turned away and went to his cabin.

She had not been able to understand her cousin's remark, reflected Hardy, as he had made it in English.

"But the man is perfectly unprincipled," he soliloquized, "and will be sure to prejudice her against me. But what difference does it make? At Strytensk I become a storekeeper, and she remains a princess. And, no doubt, she admires this Romanoff; perhaps she has enough of the savage in her own nature to admire such acts as the stabbing of that wounded Chinese. And she will no doubt nurse him. How did Romanoff manage to get wounded, anyway, and I escape scot-free? Am I to be dogged by ill luck all my life?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE FIGURE ON THE CROSS

When Hardy awoke in the morning, the sun was shining against his open cabin window. He looked out and saw a stretch of yellow water, gleaming like gold in the bright rays of the early light, and, farther away, the dark green of the interminable Siberian forests. It was a peaceful scene, with nothing in it suggestive of the dreadful conflict of the night. The corpses of the slain were even now miles below, floating on and on by Cossack villages and stretches of Manchurian woodland, proclaiming with mute tongue that another conflict had taken place between the Slav and the Mongol, and with the usual result. Hardy went on deck and there beheld a solemn and affecting scene. The dead Bouriat lay on a bier improvised of two benches, with a cross on his breast. The general, the Princess with her maid, and his comrades, with uncovered heads, stood by, while the captain read the burial service. All were weeping.

The simple service finished, the dead soldier, just as he was, in his high boots and faded, blood-stained uniform, and with the rude wooden cross tied to his breast, was lifted and consigned tenderly to the water, to float on and on in tireless but vain pursuit of those other corpses, some of which he himself had sent on their long, sad journey to the sea. Hardy saluted the Princess gravely, and would have passed her by, but she detained him.

"It is a dreadful thing for a Christian body to be disposed of in that way," said she, "but there was nothing else to do. The men wished to go ashore, bury him decently and erect a cross over him, but the general would not permit it. Doubtless there are Chinese hiding in the woods on both sides of the river, and they would have fallen on the men and killed them. But what matters the disposition of his body?" she cried, her blue eyes flashing. "He died bravely fighting for his czar, and his soul has gone to Heaven. Perhaps God will heap sand upon him. They say he killed two Chinese."

There was something in this theology suggestive of Romanoff, and Hardy asked:

"How is your cousin? I hope he is not seriously wounded?"

"He has a nasty thrust through the fleshy part of

the thigh. They have washed the wound thoroughly, and it is not dangerous. He will have to lie still, which it would be hard to make him do, in case the Chinese should attack again. He is very, very brave, is my cousin, but," she added sweetly and with a woman's rare intuition, "that is nothing,—you are all brave as lions. The captain and the general both wish me to thank you for the heroic service which you rendered last night. They are fully aware of its importance."

"I am grateful for their good opinion," replied Hardy, "but I sincerely hope there will be no further occasion for fighting. Another troop of Cossack cavalry must surely pass by to-day. We saw them frequently as long as we had no especial use for them."

"God will send us succor," said the Princess with conviction. "He never permits so many of His people to be massacred by heathens. Brave Stenka will have reached the military station by noon, and some time to-night you will hear the galloping feet of horses, flying up the road yonder. You shall see how fast he will go, and how our Cossacks will ride to the rescue! Have you seen your friend, Herr Smulders? He seems to be badly wounded, though he is being most assiduously nursed and appears

happy. He would not let me do anything for him. I am quite jealous."

"How thoughtless of me!" exclaimed Hardy. "I have not even been to ask after Smulders. With your Highness' permission, I shall go to see him now."

Hardy found Smulders lying on a couch in the dining-room, his head bound around with a towel. The fair Julia sat by him, holding his hand and dabbing his face occasionally with a perfumed handkerchief. As Hardy entered, she arose and walked away, to make place for him.

"Are you very badly wounded, my friend?" asked Hardy tenderly, sitting down at the German's head. "Is the skull fractured?"

"*Nein*," whispered Smulders, glancing mysteriously at Julia; "it is shust a scratch, like from one students' duel. *Mein Kopf* is not fractured. It iss not deep, but it iss fearful to see. So long as everything goes well, I will lie here and let Chulia nurse me. But if the Shinamens comes again, I rush into the fray unt she t'inks I fight for her with one foot in the grave."

Hardy arose.

"I predict," said he, laughing, "that you will be fortunate both in love and war."

"I loaf her very heavy," sighed Smulders.

"He is not badly wounded," Hardy informed the Princess, when he next met her on the deck. "He could be up and around, I am sure, were it not that he is in love with his nurse. In similar circumstances, I should not object to being wounded."

He could not refrain from making this remark, and glancing at her meaningly—the old cotillion days were too near, Stryetensk and the store too far away, as yet. She flushed prettily, a fleeting and involuntary confession that she understood, but, turning away, pointed to the Siberian woods.

"Have you noticed," she asked, "that the forests are on fire?" He looked. It was true. A dense cloud of smoke was rolling up from behind a long ridge that ran parallel with the river, but no flame could be seen as yet. Half an hour later the wind shifted and blew directly from the fire, bringing the acrid smell of smoke to the nostrils of the people quarantined on the *Pushkin*. The fire columns were evidently advancing up the hill, for soon trees began to burst into flame here and there along its crest.

And now the Manchurians appeared again, on their own side of the river, as before. They could be plainly seen, as the distance was in reality not great, and their dark forms stood out distinctly

against the strip of white sand that stretched between the woods and the river. They were making preparations of some kind. The general brought his field-glasses and studied them carefully. There was no doubt that they were digging a hole, but for what purpose, it was impossible to tell. The general turned to the American, who was standing by his side, and handed him the glasses, asking, "*Canon? canon?*" one of the half-dozen French words that he knew. Hardy looked long and replied, as he passed back the glasses, "*Nyet!*"

No, they were certainly not arranging to plant a cannon. There was nothing in what they were doing that suggested such a purpose. They were digging a post-hole, or something of that nature. Their mysterious actions caused the greatest wonder among the Russians, who stood in groups about the deck, watching the shore. Several even mounted upon the wheel-house and, shading their eyes with their hands, gazed earnestly, but without being able to suggest any solution, as their silence bore evidence. One thing alone seemed certain, namely, that those men yonder were engaged in some hostile move, were carrying out some scheme which their devilish Asiatic ingenuity had suggested, and which meant harm to the little party at bay on the *Pushkin*.

The Chinese did not leave their intentions long in doubt, for they brought a huge cross out from the shadows of the forest, and a struggling prisoner, whom they cast down on the earth and proceeded to nail to the cross. The general turned to Hardy with white, drawn face.

"Stenka!" he groaned.

Yes, there was no doubt of it. The unfortunate Pugacheff had been captured and was now being crucified in plain sight of his comrades. The effect upon the latter, as soon as they comprehended, was indescribable. They seized their rifles, they shook impotent fists at the shore and screamed imprecations at those fiends, engaged there in their horrid work.

One of the crew, mounting a coil of rope, addressed a few impassioned remarks to his brethren, crying:

"Come on, brothers, let us save poor Stenka, or die with him!"

Every member of the little band shouted:

"We will save him or die with him!"—and in a moment more all would have been over the rail, had not the old general drawn his revolver and leaped before them, crying in a voice of thunder:

"Stop! The first man who attempts to leave the boat, I will shoot through the head!"—and so great

was their habitual respect for authority, that they paused and regarded him in dumb amazement.

“What, my children,” he said, “would ye fall into a Chinese trap? Those fiends there are crucifying poor Stenka that we should lose our wits and plunge into the water, when they will kill us one by one. We must be brave! It is harder to stand here and watch a comrade in torture, than to die with him. Do you suppose that if there were the least chance of saving him, I would hold you back? Is there here any man who will accuse me of cowardice? No! If you go, it is I who should lead you. But I tell you we could do nothing for poor Stenka, and that we should all be killed. Let us rather pray for divine help and that the Virgin will relieve his sufferings. The time will surely come, in God’s good providence, for your revenge, and I promise that you shall feed it fat.”

Even as he spoke, the cross was heaved on high, and Stenka loomed upon it, very large and plain, in the light of the sun, shining on the white stretch of sand. The general was standing with his back against the rail, the pistol in his hand. His voice had been tender, but his eye was stern and there was that in his manner which suggested accustomed command and the prestige of a dozen famous battles.

It was a critical moment, during which the fate of all on board was at stake.

For ten, twenty seconds, for half a minute, the men stood, grasping their weapons, their muscles rigid, in various attitudes of men about to rush into the fight; and then the general conquered. Several dropped their rifles clattering to the deck, and covered their faces with their hands, sobbing. Some fell on their knees and prayed, while others, with pale faces and set teeth, resumed the tasks on which they had been engaged.

The Chinese, having finished what they had to do, retired into the cover of the woods, leaving that awful thing there in the light.

Hardy turned away, his teeth chattering, sick, giddy with horror. His eyes fell on the Princess Romanovna, white as a ghost, wringing her hands and staring at the awful object.

"Oh, why does not the Virgin help him? Why is not a miracle performed?" she whispered hoarsely. "Listen, my friend," she cried, grasping Hardy by the arm convulsively, "could you not shoot so far? Could you not put him out of his misery?"

"This is no place for you," said Hardy, "come away. Come inside."

"I will go and pray for him," she murmured, let-

ting the American lead her toward the cabin door. "I have a sacred icon with me. I will promise the Virgin half my fortune if she will save him!"

Hardy returned to the deck. On the Siberian side the fire was spreading with great rapidity, and a vast patch of many acres was blazing on the slope of the hills toward the river. He tried to stand and watch, but felt his eyes irresistibly pulled toward the thing which he knew was on the other bank. Strive as he would to look away, he felt his neck twisting, and his head would move about so that his eyes would fall on the crucifix and on the form of the wretched Stenka. As the moments passed, the American's mental torture grew. When would another troop of Cossacks pass along the military road? He listened and looked. It seemed to him that he could have heard the pounding of their horses' hoofs ten miles away.

Nothing! nothing! and in the meantime Stenka was suffering that hideous agony. He would be hours, perhaps days, dying, and Hardy knew that he should not be able to endure it. He looked again, wiping from his eyes the smoke that was now becoming acrid enough to sting them. The water had fallen so that the sand-bars projected in spots between the *Pushkin* and the Manchurian shore, while

it rippled thinly and transparently over others. Between the outer edge of the sand-bar and the bank there was a stretch of deeper water, but its width was not great.

And now an idea occurred to Hardy, the application of a desperate remedy for a desperate case. He had understood nothing of the words that had passed between the captain and the crew, though there was no possibility of mistaking their import. Why should he not again take advantage of his ignorance of Russian and act on his own initiative? While the general's back was turned, Hardy walked to the prow and dropped over the side upon a bit of hard sand. Then, rifle in hand, he ran straight toward the Manchurian shore, plashing through the shallow water, that flew about him in a spray. Men shouted after him from the *Pushkin*. He paid no attention, but ran on, his eyes fixed on the cross and the burden that it bore. Once he stepped into a channel where the water was up to his armpits and running so swiftly that it nearly swept him from his feet, but he struggled through and dashed on again.

A dozen or more Chinese came out of the forest and regarded him in wonder. Then, raising rifles, they took deliberate aim and commenced to shoot, the bullets striking about him in the water.

One, that hit several rods ahead of him, "skipped like a child's pebble and passed close to him. An still Hardy ran on, his eyes fixed on the man c the cross. He could see the features now, but coul not recognize them, they were so distorted wit agony. The head was moving slowly from side t side.

CHAPTER XXII

A HARD SHOT

The number of Chinese who emerged from the forest was surprising. There must have been a hundred of them, at least twenty of whom were mounted. There could be no further doubt as to their purpose in thus torturing Stenka, openly and in full sight of the *Pushkin*. They hoped that his comrades, maddened by the sight, would rush to his aid immediately, or would fall into the trap later, believing that the Chinese had gone away and left him there to suffer. So great was their astonishment now, when they realized that only one person was coming to Stenka's rescue, that they ceased shooting and stood staring in wonder. And still Hardy ran on, across the wide and shallow river, his eyes fixed on that spectacle of agony. At last he stopped, for the time had come for him to do the thing he must do. He could get no nearer without the absolute certainty of being shot down. There was no other way.

It would not have been possible for Stenka's friends to reach that cross without all being picked off from the woods. He cast one glance at the shore, measuring the distance with the keen, accurate eye of the marksman. Then he removed his glasses and wiped the moisture, tears, perhaps, from his eyes. Replacing them, he aimed at Stenka, and prayed :

"Receive his soul, oh God!" He fired. The head stopped that dreadful moving from side to side, and Hardy could feel, even at that distance, that the eyes were fixed on his own, in comprehension. He will believe, to his dying day, that there was gratitude in them. He had missed, however, and now the Chinese, grasping his purpose, began shooting at him in earnest, and several of the horsemen urged their steeds into the water. With the bullets scattering all about him, Hardy set his teeth and fired again.

Poor Stenka's sufferings were over. His chin fell forward on his breast and his body collapsed limply on the wooden peg thrust between his thighs.

"Thank God!" cried Hardy and, turning, he ran back toward the boat, ran madly, desperately, as he had run but once before, and that was the time when he heard the Princess scream and saved her from the brigands.

On he ran over the hard sand covered with a sheet

of rippling water, carrying his rifle low and bending at the hips. He realized that every step was taking him farther from those savages on the shore, was putting a greater distance between himself and their rifles. He scarcely believed that he could get away without being wounded. If they would only kill him outright, or would hit him in some spot that would not prevent his running! He listened, as a hare before the pursuing hunter, for the sound of the guns, and still he ran on.

But the Chinese did not shoot again, and now from the *Pushkin* came half a dozen men to the rescue, deployed in open formation, like a troop of trained soldiers, with their eyes fixed on something behind him. They were shouting to him, but Hardy could not understand.

He turned, looked, and knew why the enemy had ceased shooting. They feared killing their own horsemen, who were between him and the shore and bearing down on him rapidly. There were at least a dozen of them, and in a minute more three, better mounted than the others, would have been upon him. These were bending close to their horses' necks, and were armed with long swords to cut him down. The American aimed at the horses and fired rapidly, three times. One of the animals, mortally wounded, sank

to his knees, while the others, stung and maddened by the bullets, became unmanageable and ran snorting back toward the Manchurian shore.

The Cossacks now came up, and, turning in a volley on the mounted brigands, emptied one saddle and compelled the entire party to retire, which they did slowly, shaking their swords at the Russians and yelling imprecations. They were destined, however to lose one more of their number. The man whose horse Hardy had killed was making frantic but unsuccessful efforts to get away, his leg being pinned down beneath the dead animal. To him one of the Bouriats ran up and, wrenching the man's own sword from his hand, cleft his skull with it and left him there with his dead steed.

When Hardy again reached the deck of the *Pushkin*, the general and the captain each shook his hand in silence, and the Princess, her beautiful eyes red with weeping, said to him:

"It was an act of mercy, my friend, for which we all thank you. The soul of brave Stenka, now in Heaven, will be grateful to you."

"It was a hard thing to do," replied Hardy, faint almost to falling, "but I could not endure the sight of the agony,—I could not bear to have you look at it. It is what I should have wanted some one to

do for me," he added as though further extenuation were necessary.

"Then," said the Princess with a sad, solemn smile, "it was a Christ-like act, a deed of sublime courage, and so I shall ever regard it. But you are faint, my friend. Go and lie down and be sure that the Virgin and all the saints approve what you have just done."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks!" murmured Hardy. "If you approve, I am sure that it was right."

And still there were no signs of help, no sounds of galloping hoofs, on the military road yonder, that wound in and out of the dark forest, or stretched like a long white ribbon by the side of the yellow river.

CHAPTER XXIII

A PERILOUS MISSION

During all this time the forest fires were increasing in intensity and spreading with great rapidity. The trees were filled with a fog of smoke, that, drifting over and across the river, began to obscure the prospect. The vagrant and deserted moon, a gamboge patch in an ash-gray sky, looked sadly down through the acrid mist.

Vividly red and narrow lanes of flame ran zigzag to the water's edge, like streams of fire. Monster designs were worked out on the hillsides in fire, notably an immense heart, and, in places where the vegetation was sparse, the slopes were spotted with tiny jets of flame.

From time to time mighty pines, either already dead, or else dried in the intense heat, flared heavenward like great torches. The wind increased, hot as a simoom, and, as the afternoon wore away, sporadic burning patches began to appear on the other, or Manchurian, bank of the river.

The crucifix, with the dead Cossack upon it, was blotted out in smoke and it was a comfort to know that those gray clouds concealed in their bosom no hideous burden of suffering. There was a continuous flight of birds across the stream, whirring partridges, cuckoos, ouzel, plover, and once a bear lumbered past the boat, at which it blinked with smarting eyes, curious but unafraid.

The heat on the boat, there in the middle of the stream, was becoming most uncomfortable, and the fear arose that it might, when the forests should be blazing on both sides of the river, grow so great as to be unendurable. A flaming ember, passing high overhead, revealed the manner in which the flames were being carried across to the Chinese side. A hill there caught fire in a dozen places, that appeared, on such a large canvas, like little red patches, which burned in isolation for a while, but were soon wiped out in one continuous sheet of flame.

The sound of falling trees could be plainly heard.

At noon the smoke was a fleece and the sun was like a moon, a chrome-orange moon,—impossible,—pasted on a leaden, fuliginous sky.

The fires spread on the Manchurian side with amazing rapidity; they became a general conflagration.

By mid-afternoon the heat on the *Pushkin* was almost intolerable and the discomfort caused to the eyes from the smarting smoke was great, yet there was no longer any fear that those on board would suffocate or perish from the intensity of the heat. Matters were undoubtedly at their worst, and it was possible to live, to breathe. Out there in the middle of the river there was no danger of the boat itself catching fire, and the wind, which was coming straight down the stream, brought coolness and life with it from the wide Siberian plains.

And now a wonderful thing happened: a vast cloud of butterflies of endless variety floated, drifted, flitted and fluttered by in the wan haze.

Butterflies big and little, and of all imaginable graceful shapes were there: tiny yellow butterflies and giant yellow ones, butterflies black or purple as velvet, butterflies striped like the tiger, rayed like brilliant fans, eyed like Argus, or spotted like ocelots. For an hour they drifted, floated and flitted by, as though all the endless varieties of flowers in Siberia and Manchuria were perishing in the fire and their souls were taking flight.

The sun was at last either entirely obscured, or else looked sadly and dimly down on the scene, a terra-cotta disk, flat and thin. And while the

butterflies were going by, the pattering of many feet was heard in the shallow water, and a pack of wolves, the color of the smoke, emerged from the gray haze and trotted past the *Pushkin*, their backs arched, their bushy tails between their legs. Some did not even so much as glance at the boat, but others, with curving bodies and red eyes, looked up at her but did not stop in their course. When they came to deep water, they launched themselves fearlessly on it and swam, light as corks. Those on the *Pushkin* knew when night had come by the growing vividness of the fires. Whole acres of red devastation gleamed through the haze, while the giant pine torches, that flared up here and there, could be seen at great distances.

As Hardy stood watching the scene that night, the Princess came up to him and said:

"We have nothing to fear from the Chinese, I fancy. They must have gone away. They must think we are dead."

"It is most probable," replied Hardy, "but I fear that it will be some time before we shall be able to take to the road."

"At the military station below," said the Princess, "there is a telegraph, connecting with the one above. It is possible for a boat of shallow draft to

get down the river to a little distance back. The general asked the men if one of their number would not volunteer to carry a despatch to the station but I am ashamed to say that no one has responded. They are deterred by the dreadful fate of poor Stenka."

"I will go!" cried Hardy. "Ask the general to let me go. I can keep to the middle of the stream till I have passed the fires, either wading or swimming down the swift current. The fires can not extend more than a mile or so down the river, a distance soon passed over, and then I will take to the highway. I am a foreigner and, if captured, shall not be in so great danger as a Russian. It is not a difficult undertaking. I am sure I shall get through."

"But it is not right that you should do this for us," she objected, "you, the only foreigner on board. My cousin would go, but he can not walk. He is raging like a sick lion because he can not go, and even insists that he is able. I had hoped that the captain would volunteer, but he does not. He will be disgraced, and his command taken away from him. If need be, the general will attempt it, but he is old and can not swim. He could hardly get through."

"I swim like a fish," insisted the American, "and

I can get through. I know I can. There is no danger, really there isn't. The Manchurians have probably retreated inland, and, at any rate, I could slip through them in the dark. When Stenka went, the river was full of them right in his course."

His enthusiasm was boyish. The Princess smiled.

"A brave man," she said, "can not see danger, even when it exists."

"I shall go, anyway," declared Hardy. "Will you please ask the general to prepare a despatch for me, immediately? If he does not consent, I shall start down the river without it and shall try to make the garrison at the station understand, which may be a difficult matter. I give you my word as a gentleman that I shall pursue this course, that I am inflexible in my resolve. I ask you as a favor to represent the matter to the general for me. Now is the time to go," he added eagerly, "for we shall soon be out of food, and, besides, when the fires subside, the Manchurians will return."

The Princess left him without a word, but returned ten minutes later, smiling sadly and shaking her head.

"It is as I thought," she said. "The general refuses. He says it would be an eternal disgrace to the Russian arms, if a foreigner should undertake

this thing. He is making one more appeal to the men. He is calling them sheep, Japanese, poltroons."

The voice of the old soldier could be heard at the other end of the boat, now sorrowful, now savage.

"He is now calling them women,"—and here the Princess smiled again, and Hardy noticed that no amount of danger, privation or suffering could take the brave light of laughter from her eyes.

"I had hoped," said Hardy sadly, "that you people would no longer regard me quite in the light of a foreigner. As far, at least, as the people on the boat are concerned, I have tried to earn the right to be counted one of you. If I have done anything to merit your own regard, personally, I ask you, as an especial favor, to prepare this despatch for me and let me be off! I tell you again, that I shall certainly go, with or without it. If you refuse, I shall on the instant jump into the river, and start on my journey."

"I beg of you not to put it in that way," replied the Princess. "If you put it in that way, you know I can not refuse. I hope the occasion may arise some day that will allow me in some way to show in a befitting manner my great and lasting gratitude

to you. But now you are taking an unfair advantage. You are seeking to place me under still greater obligations to you."

"I ask for no gratitude," replied Hardy. "I am simply seeking a favor, an accommodation from you. I am begging you to write a few lines for me. Does your Highness still refuse? Well then, good-by, and God be with you! If we do not meet again, I beg you sometimes to think of me as one who, who, —good-by!"

He laid one hand on the rail, but she extended her arm and detained him.

"Stay," she whispered, "I will write the despatch for you."

She went to her cabin and Hardy made his few hurried preparations for departure, which consisted simply in swallowing a few mouthfuls of *zakouska*, in filling his flask with vodka, and in slipping into his pocket a flat bottle, empty but tightly corked. When he returned to the deck, he found the Princess waiting for him, with the despatch ready. Hardy wound it into a tight cylinder and poked it into the bottle, which he corked and put into his pocket.

"Thank you," he said simply to the Princess.

She extended her hand, and he took it, holding it,

but afraid to look into her eyes. It was an honest hand that held his own in a strong, warm pressure.

"I shall pray for your safety," she murmured, "all the time till I see you or hear from you again."

He raised the hand to his lips, then climbed lightly over the rail and dropped into the river. The water reached nearly to his armpits at this place. He did not look back, but, throwing himself on his face, swam with easy strokes, the swift current sweeping him rapidly downward. Soon his knees touched the soft sand, and he was able to walk for some distance. He had not gone far ere he came on a stranded and abandoned raft, and he rolled a piece of timber from this which he guided to the deep current. He was glad to lie down again and float upon this bit of wood, letting the water cover his body, for he was coming to a narrower part of the stream and the air was very hot.



Hardy climbed over the rail and dropped *Page 210*

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CHAPTER XXIV

ROMANOFF'S WOOING

"I tell you I can go! I can get through, somehow! Men have gone greater distances, worse wounded than I."

It was Romanoff who was speaking. He sat up and turned, facing the general as though he would rise. His wound had stiffened and the pain consequent on the exertion caused him to turn pale, but he did not wince. He was lying in the dining-room, on one of the upholstered cushions that extended around three sides of it.

"The current is at least six miles an hour," he insisted, "and with something light to cling to I could float the entire distance."

The heat was stifling, and the port-holes were milky with smoke.

"I shall be better off, my dear General, out in the air than in this oven, and the cool water will do my leg good. I wish," he groaned, smiling as he made

another move, "that I had that Chinaman to kill over again. What a pity it is that a Chinaman has not so many lives as a cat!"

The general laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"For the purpose of vengeance, nine lives might do very well," he replied good-humoredly, "but in the present case, I am glad they have only one, or we should be fighting yet. You really must lie down, my dear Prince. It is preposterous for you even to think of going, and if you do, it will be against my express orders. Indeed, I hope you will not oblige me to constrain you by force."

At this moment the Princess entered.

"Don't excite yourself, Boris," she said anxiously, "or you will neutralize all the good effects of my nursing. I think it ungrateful of you not to lie still and let me show what I can do."

"Yes, and leave you here to starve or be burned up, or perhaps be carried off by the Manchurians when they return, which they are certain to do, when the fire subsides."

"There," said the general, "you have your commands from an authority which you ought to respect, if you do not heed mine. I shall have another talk with the men. I am sure they are ashamed of themselves by this time."

"It will be unnecessary for you to trouble yourself further about the matter," said the Princess, blushing slightly and looking down, "for a—a—man—some one has already gone."

Romanoff started violently and fixed his eyes on her.

"Who was it?" asked the general.

The Princess threw her head back and regarded him defiantly. "The American," she replied.

"Ten thousand devils!" exclaimed Romanoff.

"The meddling dog!"

"But I refused to let him go," said the general.

"It is a disgrace to the Russian name."

"I take all the responsibility," said the Romanovna bravely. "He asked me as a favor to write the despatch for him, and I did so. He has placed me under certain obligations, and I felt I could not refuse."

"And I suppose," sneered Romanoff, "that if he were to ask you for a kiss, you would think it your duty to grant even that. Your gratitude, no doubt, will be undying."

"You forget yourself, sir!" cried Romanovna, turning on him with flashing eyes. "You presume too much on your relationship. One more such speech and I shall cancel your name from the

list of my speaking acquaintance. General, I await your sentence. I beg that you will not pass over my offense lightly."

"Oh, this is all nonsense," growled the general. "You know that I can not punish you,—would I if I could. If one of the men had done this, I should know what to do with him. But no way has ever been devised for managing an unruly woman, preventing her having her way!"

With this ungracious speech, he turned and left the room. The Princess gazed after him sadly. This, then, was her punishment,—the brave commander's displeasure,—and it was not easy to bear.

"I choose to forget your extraordinary remark, Boris," she said, sitting down by her cousin. "I shall remember that you are wounded, and that you must be suffering, here in this hot, smoky air. I sympathize with your irritation, too, and think you noble of you. I would much rather that a Russian had gone,"—and she laid her hand soothingly on his forehead.

"Why did you not encourage my going then?" he asked, still sullen.

"I believe, with the general, that you are unable to go, that the effort would almost certainly have resulted in your death."

"And you don't want me to die, I suppose? You

would be desolated by my departure for another sphere?"

"Now, Boris, don't be sarcastic. Of course I should be desolated, as you call it, if anything happened to you."

"Elizabetha," said Romanoff eagerly, "you know why I endure it so ill when others perform services for you. You know that I would undertake any task that might win your regard, your love; that I would gladly face any danger in your behalf. And now that this,—this American,—has saved your life, I could kill him for it!"

"You did not want my life saved then?" she asked sweetly.

"Oh, you are enough to try the temper of an angel! You know what I mean. I did not want *him* to do it. You are under no obligation to him for having saved your life. You know that there is not a man in your circle of acquaintance who would not consider it the greatest luck in the world to have a chance to brave danger for you; and that such an opportunity should have come to this, this—"

"Be generous, Boris, if you wish to win my esteem," interrupted the Princess, "and don't be unreasonable in your envy. You have braved danger for me, and are now wounded, fighting in my be-

half, and I am nursing you. Can you not imagine that there are those who would envy your present position? You are not grateful even for the favors that you do receive. Think of your wound, which is really quite serious."

"Well, then, you be serious for once," said Romanoff, smiling in spite of himself, "and tell me that you love me. Surely, you can not doubt my devotion."

"Do you think it quite fair to bring that subject up here?" she asked, "when you know that you have me at a disadvantage?"

"But you always find some excuse for not talking to me about it. You always evade me in some way. But I am not a man," he cried fiercely, "to be evaded or escaped. I love you as only a Romanoff can love. I shall not give up suing for your hand while I live, and woe to the man who crosses my path! Oh, if I could only fight for you, I would wade through seas of blood, but I would have you! I would have you!"

Romanovna shuddered, but she came nearer loving him at that instant than at any other moment of her life.

"If you will not talk of these matters now, will you, after we get to Moscow?"



"Perhaps," she replied softly; "but tell us about Japan, unless it irritates your wound to talk."

"I tell you my wound is nothing,—just a trifling inconvenience. What good it did that beast of a Chinaman to stab me before I killed him, I can't understand. It was a malignant act that he had only two seconds' enjoyment of."

"But I thought you were grateful to him, for bestowing a wound on you while fighting in my defense. You are in a very ungracious mood to-day, Boris." And she laughed, a spontaneous, cheerful laugh, the very echo of healthful humor.

"Well," he growled, indulging her whim, "if that's the way you look at it, he might have given me something worth while, something that at least would have aroused your pity for me. Now, that German over there with his bloody pate is a ten times more appealing spectacle than I am. By the way, I'll order him out of here. I can't talk with somebody listening to every word I say."

"Indeed, I shall allow you to do nothing of the kind," said the Princess. "He fought bravely and deserves every consideration at our hands. Neither of them understands a word of Russian, and, moreover, they are so absorbed in each other, that they would not listen to us if they did."

"You are a great lover of foreigners," growled Romanoff. "I wish I were a German, or an American Jew or anything but a Russian."

Romanovna flushed with displeasure, but she replied calmly: "I don't know whether to be amused or exasperated at you, your irritability renders you so unreasonable, Boris. But do try to control yourself. I don't wish to get angry with you to-day. We have quarreled almost continuously ever since we were children. Let's get along as cousins should for a few days. Listen!" she cried with sprightliness, "I hereby register a vow that I will not quarrel with you until your wound heals. So it will do you no good, not the least good in the world, to badger me. But beware what you say, sir! After you get on your feet again, I shall resume our ancient feud, and I shall treasure up against you every mean thing you say in the meantime."

"It's all your fault if we quarrel," replied Romanoff. "If you wouldn't be so obstinate and tantalizing, if you weren't so lovely and peace-destroying—"

"But you promised to tell me about your adventures in Japan," interrupted the Princess, with decision; "it is ungracious of you to keep me in ignorance of your adventures there, which must have

been most exciting, when you know that I am dying to hear all about them."

"Why, there isn't much to tell. I passed myself off as an Englishman, and sounded all classes of people. I took note of the popular feeling, of the strength of the national defenses and resources, and made plans of the principal fortifications and sea approaches. All the time I was thinking of you and wearing my heart out for another sight of you—"

"Yes!" exclaimed the Princess. "This is most absorbing—about the condition of affairs there, I mean. And what conclusion did you arrive at, my dear cousin?"

"I became positively convinced that the Japanese mean to make war on Russia; that no diplomatic temporizing can postpone the struggle much longer. The whole nation, to a man, to a woman, to a child, is united against us by the bonds of the most fanatic hatred. Their population comprises no classes, no disaffected races; they are a unit in this matter. The war will be one to the death, and they will fight until the last man is killed. I concluded, moreover, that they are not a foe to be despised. They are a formidable sea power, and they can throw large and well-equipped armies into Manchuria and Korea within a very few weeks after the first blow

is struck. I shall advise the Little Father to begin pouring troops into the far East and to strengthen the defenses and garrison of Port Arthur immediately. I shall ask to be sent to the front with the first troops that go."

"Of course you will, my brave cousin!" cried the Princess admiringly, "and you will come back from the war covered with glory and I shall be proud of you! But I can scarcely believe that Japan is so formidable an adversary as you say."

"You will see," replied Romanoff with conviction.

"Well, let her begin the war!" said the Princess rising, her eyes flashing. "There can be only one outcome of it, and that will result in the added prestige and power of Holy Russia! But tell me more of your personal adventures."

"Why, they are not particularly interesting. I passed off all right enough as an Englishman, till this fellow Hardy came along."

"Mr. Hardy? You met him there? You did not tell me this, nor has he."

"No, and I surmise the fellow has good reasons not to. Soon after his arrival, I became convinced that the police were on my trail. So I attempted to throw suspicion on him. I conducted him to the

fortifications of Yokohama, and he, in seeming innocence, took photographs of them. I also made a copy of my draft of the fortifications and slipped it into his overcoat pocket. We were arrested, and, after much palaver, we were sent on our way. There was a Japanese girl on the train, by the way, to whom he made love in the most open manner. They were as thick as two billing doves. He was infatuated with her; said that her cheeks were tinged with moonlight, that she was yellow because her mortal clay was mixed with gold-dust and that she was a Queen of Fairy-land—”

“He must be something of a poet,” said the Princess, laughing nervously, “this Mr. Hardy. Now, if you could talk to the women like that, my dear cousin! Were you not jealous of him?”

“Jealous? Jealous of his success with a coolie girl? Not I, who know such women as you! Elizabetha, I—”

“But this Japanese girl! This is intensely exciting. What has she to do with the story?”

“Nothing, except that your Hardy remained there in Japan with her, and I was sent home, as I supposed, on a steamer from Hakodate. I had not been out long before I found that I had been betrayed, and that I was to be locked up somewhere, on an

island. Such were the orders, but the crew were actually planning to kill me. I escaped, killed two or three of them, put to sea in an open boat, was picked up by a Chinese sampan, and so got back to Russia."

"My brave Boris! The Virgin was with you, and, besides, they found that they had captured a lion."

"But I have not finished telling you about this American. I am convinced that he is a Japanese sympathizer and that he suggested to the authorities there that I was not an Englishman. He is a low fellow, and I strongly suspect that he is a Jew. He was coming over here, he said, to run a store. He is a libertine, I am sure, and remained behind to conduct his intrigues with the Japanese girl,—Aisome, I believe she called herself."

"But this is mere conjecture, Boris, and I must not believe these things against him, till they are proved."

"Why must you not believe them? What reason have you for regarding him with such favor? Tell me."

"Because he has shown himself, so far as I have observed, a gentleman of the most resolute courage, and the most refined and delicate sentiments."

"Oh, he has! Well, when I tell you that he is a

low fellow, probably an enemy of Russia, a libertine, perhaps a Jew—”

“I can not listen to you, Boris,” said the Princess, “you really must be more generous.” Her voice was low, but there was an angry light in her eyes.

“Has the fellow been making love to you, as he did to the Japanese?” sneered Romanoff.

The Princess arose and moved away.

“I said that I would not quarrel with you, Boris,” she murmured. There were tears in her lovely blue eyes. She was sure now that she could never love her cousin, and she knew that the imputations against Hardy, who, as far as her own observations went, approached very near to her ideal of a chivalric gentleman, would rankle in her bosom like a poisoned arrow.

She walked over to Smulders and was inquiring after him, in German, which she understood, when she heard the loud shriek of a whistle, and the general rushed into the room.

“We are saved!” he cried. “Two boats with twenty soldiers on them have come down the river. They were sent down as soon as news of the fire was telegraphed to the station above. They have a launch with them, and her Highness can be transferred without even wetting her dainty feet.”

"I am forgiven, then, General?" asked the Princess. "I have been severely punished in enduring your displeasure, even for so short a time."

"Beauty such as yours, Madame, can do no wrong," replied the gallant general, extending his hand.

"Perhaps," said Romanoff grimly, "the Chinese will get him and serve him as they did Stenka."

They were taken on the two fresh boats in the early dawn and steamed away by the light of a red sun that stained with dragon's blood the clouds piled in masses above the blackened forests, still fiercely burning. As they made a bend in the river that shut out from sight the stranded *Pushkin*, the ash-gray veil lifted for a moment from the Manchurian side, revealing the great cross and the form of brave Stenka Pugacheff hanging on it. The Russians crossed themselves, and uncovering their heads, prayed silently for the repose of his soul. Then, raising their hands to Heaven, they swore vengeance.

CHAPTER XXV

KNIGHT-ERRANT

Hardy's journey down the swift, vague, mysterious river that night was an experience never to be forgotten. Often, as he clung to his little raft, his knees would scrape on the soft sand, and just as frequently he would swing off into deep water and hang suspended above depths where he might easily drown, should he take a cramp or lose his nerve. Several times he grounded on sand-banks and was obliged to drag off his wooden buoy, a matter of no little difficulty, as it was partly waterlogged and very heavy. Once he drifted close to shore and found himself in a counter current, that actually was taking him back toward the *Pushkin*, and it was only by swimming at right angles to this and giving his raft frequent vigorous pushes, that he managed at last to get out into the downward sweep of the stream.

Fortunately, the fires had not burned close to the water's edge at this point.

The smoke lay across the stream in a series of giant festoons. When he floated into one of them the acrid cloud was stifling, choking, and there was naught to do but keep his face close to the water and drift blindly.

When he came out into clearer spaces, the spectacle was weird, Stygian, majestic. The forest burning on either hand—the vast, lonely forest suggested a world set afire and forsaken, with the flickering light that fell on the river tipped the sand-hills with red and stained the rippling stretch of water with blood.

Once, while in a dark mass of smoke, he heard mournful howling, as of ill-omened hounds, a sharp, plaintive yelping.

Emerging, he beheld a pack of wolves huddled upon an island of sand, unreal as ghosts. He floated quite close to them, not fearing them and knowing they did not fear him.

In this monstrous world, this seemingly chimeric and fantastic world, Boston, America, the loss of his fortune, the girl that had jilted him, were all forgotten. He was a knight-errant of olden times, performing a feat of valor amid such surroundings—the thaumaturgy of a Wagner or a Goethe might have conjured out of the thin air of poetic sorcery

He was winning his spurs, rescuing from danger a beautiful Princess whom he had come to a far land to find.

But the fire did not extend a great distance down the river, not over three miles in all, perhaps. Hardy was about three hours accomplishing this part of his journey, for, though the current was swift, he was, as we have seen, subjected to many delays. At last he swung out into a large circular pocket or basin, quite shallow and without motion save for a sluggish current running around its outer edge. It had evidently been in the main stream at one time, but the water, falling, had converted an opposing sand-bar into a dam.

He skirted this basin, resting on his tiny raft, without knowing that he had left the main body of the river, for the few dim stars and the rag of a moon gave little light and the waters were now black as ink. A lone pine, on a bluff, kindled, no doubt, by a stray ember, burst into flames at this moment, and, by this magnificent torch, his situation was revealed to him. The whole shallow basin took on a deep red glow, and Hardy saw that a narrow sand-pit separated him from the river proper, which was about a quarter of a mile wide at this point.

He arose to his feet, dripping and chilly, for the

air was cool now, and looked about him. There was a good, sandy beach on the other side, and the military road could be plainly seen. It was time to take to the shore, and that stretch of water must be got over somehow. It was probable that he could wade much of it, but some of it was, no doubt, over his head, perhaps of great depth. He would be carried swiftly down stream, but the beach extended as far as his eye could reach, fading out at last in the darkness where the light from his pine-tree torch failed to reach. Putting the bottle with the despatch in his trousers pocket, he removed his coat, improvised a string from the lining and tied his shoes about his neck. He remembered with a smile that it had occurred to him to take off his shoes on leaving the *Pushkin*, but that he had been deterred by the presence of the Princess.

Leaving his coat on the sand, he started bravely around the basin to the point nearest the opposite shore. So eagerly were his eyes fixed on this, in his anxiety to get his bearings while the tree was still burning, that he stumbled over some large object, about the size of a log, but too soft for one. Looking down, he was horrified to behold three bodies of dead Chinese, lying side by side, parallel, in an exact position as though arranged by human hands.

They were all gazing straight up at the sky with glassy eyes, and the flare of the burning tree threw a ghastly light on their yellow faces. Three or four yards from them lay the body of the slain Bouriat, with his rude wooden cross,—the emblem of the Prince of Peace and of Holy Russia,—bound to his breast. Hardy ran back, picked up his coat, and, after a moment's hesitation, dropped it decently over the Bouriat's face. He had lost his life in defense of the Princess. Then, as the light of the burning tree flared defiantly starward and went out in the darkness, he waded boldly into the black waters.

As he had hoped, the water was for much of the distance, shallow. At times, however, it rose to his armpits, and then the current was so strong that it swept him from his feet. He struggled resolutely onward, keeping the current at right angles with his body, and when at last he plunged into deep water, he swam, not, it is true, with the amphibious assurance and primal animal skill of a Romanoff, but with a cool, calculating ease that told him the distance could not be great and that he must not exhaust his strength. He soon touched bottom again, after letting down his feet half a dozen times, and was gratified that the slope shoreward was so rapid that he was able, in a very few minutes, to run.

An hour after leaving the basin he was on the military road that stretched, dimly gray, between the stolid, silent black of the Siberian forests and the star-sprinkled, whispering black of the river.

He reached the military station,—a rambling building of square, hewn logs, flanked by several small structures,—about ten o'clock, and, breaking his bottle, gave his despatch to a white-haired and corpulent soldier, with a very red face, whose frayed and faded uniform proved him a petty officer of some sort. This man glanced through the paper with wondering eyes, then read it aloud to a nondescript group of old women, two or three soldiers, and a farmer or two who soon collected about him. Then he dashed into the house and set a telegraph instrument, over which he sometimes presided, to clicking.

Hardy, chilled to the marrow, now that he had ceased walking and running, and wearied to the point of collapse, sank on a rustic bench, believing himself forgotten in the excitement evidently occasioned by his news. In this he soon found himself mistaken, however, for a toothless old crone, with a kindly face and a red handkerchief tied over her head, came up to him and, taking him by the arm, inquired :

“Zakowska?”

He swallowed three glasses of vodka and ravenously devoured several caviar sandwiches, after which he was supplied with warm, dry clothing and tucked away in bed.

When he awoke it was mid-afternoon, and the old commandant had delved into a Russian-French dictionary sufficiently to dig out the words, which he pronounced many times, with a smiling face, "*Sauves, Monsieur, tous sauves!*" thereby affording the American the greatest joy and relief and establishing his own reputation at the station as a wonderful scholar.

Hardy remained at the station one week, at the end of which time he resumed his journey to Stryensk on horseback, escorted by half a dozen Cossacks bound for Irkutsk, on some military mission or other.

As he passed by daylight the blackened and devastated forests, his recent journey up the Amur, and his experiences on the *Pushkin* seemed like a dream to him. When he reached the *Pushkin*, however, still reclining on the sand, the dream quickened into reality, and a feeling of intense homesickness or loneliness took possession of him, as when one beholds an untenanted house, out of which a loved one has been carried, never more to return.

He could again see the Princess, tall and beautiful, standing on the deck, could feel the light pressure of her hand on his arm, could hear in imagination the tones of her voice, earnest, even sad at times, but with the laughter lurking behind, ever ready to ripple through. Yes, that was life while it lasted, he reflected, for the Princess was there; and perhaps it would have been better for his happiness had life ended there, in that wild fight for her sweet sake.

For now came Stryetensk and the store, and he should in all probability never see her again.

But a man, if he be a man, must be brave, whatever his fate, and Hardy did not long give rein to thoughts like these. He turned his face resolutely towards Stryetensk, gaining what comfort he could from the remembrance that he had acquitted himself worthily while under her eyes. Of one thing he was quite sure: she should see that he did not wish to presume on anything that he had done for her. If he ever met her again, it would not be through his seeking.

He learned, very soon after his arrival at Stryetensk, that the relief party had put in an appearance a short time after his start down the river on his perilous trip, and that the Princess had been rescued this time entirely without his aid.

CHAPTER XXVI

HARDY RECEIVES TWO LETTERS

The store at Stryetensk was a low, rambling building, constructed in the shape of a capital E without the middle bar. A high board fence, connecting the extremities of the two wings, inclosed one side of a square yard which contained outbuildings and sheds for horses, a droshky or two, and several of the long boat-shaped telegas that do duty in that country as drays. In the outhouse, moreover, was kept a supply of plows and other agricultural implements, while the store itself was stocked with an immense and motley assortment of general merchandise suited to the retail demand of the region, and for wholesale shipments to the towns along the Shilka River, on which stream Stryetensk is located.

Hardy found the city itself dreary in the extreme, consisting merely of a collection of raw, squalid houses, located on dusty or muddy streets. It was

as new and rough as the newest frontier town in America and hopelessly unattractive, despite the fact that it was surrounded by noble hills, and that the beautiful Shilka flowed between it and the extensive railroad shops that are maintained at this point.

During his first day in the town, he put up at the Darnivostock Hotel, but found the lodging so abominable, the fare so execrable and the service so insolent that he was glad to engage an old peasant woman of all work, and begin housekeeping in some unoccupied rooms of the Trading Company's store.

Besides this old woman, his only companion was a young Russian clerk, who spoke a little bad English, which he practised on Hardy with such persistence that he became a nuisance, entertaining him with such remarks as :

“Good morning, Mr. Hardy. The barn of my store is not so large as the barn of my uncle. Have you seen the barn of my uncle?” or, “Good evening, Mr. Hardy. Do you think the black horse is as good as the white horse? Neither the one nor the other is so good as the horse of my aunt.”

This interesting person was possessed of the skin of a baby, pink cheeks, very thick, red lips, blue eyes and tin-foil hair. His name was Vasili Ogorodnikoff. He imagined himself a great merchant, and

his manner toward Hardy oscillated between superciliousness and the other extreme of sudden servility when reminded of his position. He was either presumptuous or groveling. It was impossible to treat him as an equal.

And here, from the very start, Hardy got his first taste of hard work, and came to realize what a blessing it is; how it ennobles a man's surroundings, however strange, prosaic or uninviting, and what a royal panacea it is for blues, homesickness, love-sickness, or any species of festering discontent. In addition to the daily business of the store, it was necessary for him to take stock, familiarize himself with the details of the trade, get what idea he could of the accounts, study the commercial possibilities of the region. He saw immediately, that if he did not wish to continue at the mercy of Vasili, he must learn the Russian language as soon as possible; this, indeed, must be his first object. He must swallow Russian in great gulps and must digest it. He therefore looked about for a teacher. The only available person he could find was a Russian Jew, who, despite his youth, wore a great bale of bushy red whiskers, falling to the fourth button of his shabby waistcoat.

Mordecai Baruch knew English very well, as he had spent several years in New York, in the factory

of a relative engaged there in the manufacture of caps. He undertook to teach Hardy Russian, and he found the latter a most assiduous pupil, devoting as many as four hours a day to the subject.

Baruch was an intelligent person, of considerable learning, who talked most interestingly concerning the condition of the Jews in Russia, their habits, folk-lore, literature and the like. The fact that he was the only inhabitant of Stryetensk besides Hardy himself who had even been in America, established a bond of sympathy between the two men. The American, desirous of putting in every possible moment in the practice of Russian, frequently had the Jew present while he was eating, and often took him along on the strolls in which he indulged for the sake of exercise. He tried once or twice to utilize Vasili for this purpose, but that gentleman was too intent on learning English from Hardy.

Within a month the American was master of a great number of useful phrases, and by the first of September, he had begun to read a little and to make his housekeeper understand him. Baruch, like all other Jews, possessed a genius for doing excellently anything that paid him, and he soon proved himself a most skilful teacher.

Hardy had not been long in Stryetensk before he

received a letter from Mrs. Johnny Folkstone, the Boston society leader, calling him a naughty boy for running away to the ends of the earth and deserting all his friends, and assuring him that society would not have been able to do without him, money or no money, had he seen fit to remain.

"A social favorite like you," continued the fair writer, "really has no need of money, so long as some woman, who is in the swim, takes him up. Nobody cares where he lives, so long as he is unmarried, and he can generally manage to have invitations enough to luncheon and dinner to keep him from starving. The only necessities for which he must pay, are clothes. I had no intention of dropping you, neither had Mrs. de Puyster Biddle-Biddle. She was saying to me the other day that we had no one now who really knew how to lead cotillions since Freddy Hardy went away."

Hardy winced as he came to the old familiar "Freddy;" then the thought of that stern battle on the Amur thrilled him, and he read on, the letter seeming to him as if it were about somebody else, or as if its sentiments were echoes from a dead past.

"Why don't you come back, Freddy? We'll receive you with open arms. You certainly must have enough left to keep up appearances with, so far as

is necessary, and we'll marry you to a rich woman, Mrs. Biddle-Biddle and I will, within the year. We've one picked out for you already, the Widow Featherly! What do you think of that? She has a million and a half, and, though a trifle dumpy and gushy, is a good sort. Besides, she'd fall at the first shake of the tree. Some things have happened since you left which make me think she was in love with you. For one thing, she is entirely too spiteful about your old fiancée, who, by the way, is perfectly miserable with Sunderland, and is flirting desperately with young Alf Eberhart; you remember him? She is a weak little thing, Freddy, and her family drove her into breaking with you when you lost your money. A blessed good thing it was for you, too, for I don't know what you would ever have done with her without your fifty thousand a year. But come back and marry the Widow Featherly, that's a good boy. You won't make a million and a half out in that country if you stay there a lifetime, and you weren't cut out for a business man, you know you weren't, Freddy—"

Frederick Courtland Hardy sat for some time gazing over the top of the sheet, dreaming. This mention of women brought up the image of a woman in his mind, but it was not that of the woman who

jilted him, neither was it the mental picture of the dumpy and gushy Featherly. It was rather that of a tall and stately lady with straw-colored hair, laughing blue eyes and aristocratic features, and he saw her now in his mind's eye as he beheld her that time on the banks of the lordly Amur, strolling indolently along, with a Japanese parasol over her shoulder and a bunch of wild tiger-lilies in her hand.

"She is infinitely above me," he mused, "according to the ideas of this country, and yet I don't believe I belong to Mrs. Johnny's set any longer. The Princess has lifted me above that. After all, I shall feel more worthy of her if I keep my own self-respect, and that I can do best by doing the work that has fallen to my lot, and by looking fate squarely in the eye."

Hardy did not get much satisfaction from Mrs. Folkstone's letter. He was pleased, of course, to learn that his old friends had not quite cast him off, but there was no strong appeal to his manhood in the career that they offered him, and the selfishness and insincerity of society were too evident. He could still make himself useful to it, so it would graciously take him back, even if he had lost his fortune!

Another letter, received not long after his arrival in Stryetensk, gave him more pleasure.

It was written on the daintiest and lightest of Japanese paper, in very small and exquisitely-formed script. As Hardy picked this letter up from his writing-table, there was something about it that suggested femininity, even before he opened it.

“A woman, eh?” he muttered, “and in Japan. I wonder who are in Japan this summer? Perhaps the Castletons.”

He held the envelope closer to his eyes to examine the script to see if he could guess at the writer’s identity, when the problem was solved. A faint and elusive perfume arose to his nostrils, so faint as to be almost imperceptible, yet imperishable as the memory of a kiss, and the image of Aisome took shape again before his mind,—Aisome, as she had stood that night on the wharf at Hakodate, bidding him good-by, dainty as a moon-flower, exquisite as a Queen of Fairy-land.

YOKOHAMA, August 16, 1903.

You will perhaps be surprised at hearing from me, but you will not accuse me of forwardness, I am sure, when you learn my reason for addressing you in this manner. Some time ago the estimable Mr. Sano did me the honor of desiring to marry me. Soon after your departure for Hakodate, he again offered me his hand, and when I made it plain

him that I should never consent, he became very angry and accused me,—how shall I express myself?—of having become infatuated with the American, meaning you. In his jealous rage he revealed the fact that he had given secret orders to the captain of the *Shikoku Maru* to have you disposed of. “You will never,” he exclaimed, gnashing his teeth like a wolf, “behold your beloved American again.” You can imagine that this confession did not advance Mr. Sano to any great extent in my esteem. Though I did not betray myself to him, I was nearly frantic concerning you. I went to the higher authorities, told them frankly of Sano’s proposal to me, and of his plot against your life. I claimed any interest in you, further than the fact that you were innocent, and that you were a well-known American, and that it would not be wise at this time to excite American hostility, or to involve us in complications with that country. Sano, being summoned, denied the plot, denied that he had ever sought my hand, or that he had any feeling for me except admiration for my talents. The authorities were rather amused over the affair and seemed to think that I bore Sano some private grudge, which was trying to pay off. I was reduced to despair, not fully knowing what course to pursue next, when the news arrived that the *Shikoku Maru* had been wrecked and that you were taken off and carried to Vladivostok by a Russian merchant steamer. I take it for granted that you are safely in Stryetensk ere this

and are deeply immersed in your new duties. Sano, by the way, is so bitter against me now and so intent on my ruin, that I have applied for service in Manchuria, a task for which I am fitted by my thorough knowledge of the Chinese language. So you see into what trouble you have got me by calling me your "Queen of Fairy-land" and your "Little Lilac Blossom." Are not women silly?

I am firmly convinced that this susceptibility to flattery renders them unfitted for all serious work in the world.

But I could not rest without letting you know that I did not deceive you and that I am not the treacherous creature you must have thought me, if you gained any inkling of the designs upon you. I suppose you have entirely forgotten your Japanese friends ere this, and that you have become an enthusiastic admirer of the beauty of the Russian ladies. Still, if you should ever think of me again, I should hate to have any unpleasant impression associated with the memory of one whom you once thought of as a "Lilac Blossom," and a "Queen of Fairy-land." Am I not silly?

Your friend,

AISOME MOSURO.

Hardy was grateful to Aisome for writing him this letter, and he saw in the impulse which dictated it only a delicate perception of the right thing, a friendly desire to preserve one of his most charming

impressions, and to protect her own memory, as treasured in the heart of a stranger, now in a distant land. Deciding that this was one of the most agreeable letters he had ever received in his life, and regretting that as Aisome had not given her address he could not thank her for it, he locked it away in his desk, to treasure it as a souvenir of a very dainty lady, the thought of whom would always give him pleasure.

He gained from the letter that Aisome was a most feminine woman, despite her calling, but the idea never occurred to him that she was in love with him.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HATED JEW

One morning, as Hardy was busy at his desk in the rear of the principal room of the store, Vasili came and stood beside him, smiling superciliously.

"Are there many Jews in America?" he asked.

Hardy, believing that this was simply another attempt on the part of his clerk to take an English lesson, replied sharply:

"I don't know. Don't talk to me now, please, I'm busy."

But Vasili, contrary to his custom, when he was coolly received, persisted:

"The Jews are very numerous in Russia. They are much hated by the Christians. They crucified our Saviour and they sacrifice young children to their heathen rites."

This was rather an extended effort for Vasili, and, though it had a decided Ollendorffian ring, there was something in his manner that indicated a deeper

urpose than the mere desire to profit by his superior's English.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Hardy with irritation. "I have no patience with any such folly. That is all an idle superstition unworthy to be entertained by a man of your intelligence."

"Nonsense, is it?" sneered Vasili. "My father hates the Jews, and my uncle hates them worse than my father. Do the Americans love the Jews?"

"No, they do not love them, neither do they hate them. Some of our best citizens are Jews. There is no such thing as religious persecution in America. Any man is respected in that country who earns his living honestly."

Vasili went about his work, but returned later with the remark:

"The people of this town want the Jews to go. They do not understand why you are seen so much with the Jew, Mordecai. It might be dangerous for you, if there should be trouble. Some say that you are an American Jew."

Hardy dropped his pen and looked up with interest. A slight flush, a red spot, crept into his cheek.

"You may tell my esteemed and somewhat meddling neighbors, for me," he drawled, "that I am neither a Jew nor a Choctaw Indian, and that when

I need their advice in my private affairs, I shall call them in."

"I am a Russian," persisted Vasili; "do you love Jews better than Russians?"

"My dear Vasili, when you persist in making a nuisance of yourself, as at present, I am quite sure that I like the Jews better than the Russians, or at least than some Russians. If you have anything to do, will you kindly go about it? I never felt better able to endure your absence than at this very instant."

Vasili moved away, smiling, but it was an evil smile.

Hardy returned to his accounts and tried to dismiss his clerk's remarks from his mind. He succeeded for the time being, as the work before him was engrossing, but later in the day the Russian's observations persistently recurred to him, and caused him considerable annoyance. He fancied that the retail trade had been falling off somewhat, and wondered if this were a result of the Russian lessons with the Jew. The next morning he took a long walk with Mordecai, crossing the ferry that is ingeniously run by the force of the river's current and struck out into the hills. Hitherto he had been deeply absorbed in the Russian lessons, and even

there had been constantly in his mind the thought that this was *her* language, and that, if he should ever meet her again, he would be able to talk with her in her own tongue.

Now, however, he was distracted by the scowling faces of the early villagers whom he met on the streets. The raft-like ferry was crowded, and he noticed that the passengers drew away from himself and Mordecai, as though fearing some contagion. These people muttered, repeating the words, "The Jew! The Jew!" with a loathing and fear such as Hardy had never heard put into human speech before. As uttered by them, the word itself became an epithet of hate and superstitious horror, the most opprobrious insult that could be hurled at a fellow creature.

Hardy glanced at Mordecai. His companion stood silent, looking down, nervously clasping one hand in the other, the collar of his long cloak turned up about his ears. Once he looked up, a fleeting glance, and there was a baleful light, half hate, half fear, in his reddish-brown eyes.

On the country road which they took after leaving the ferry, they passed several telegas, or long wagons, coming into town, and Hardy observed that the drivers of these also eyed him and his com-

panion with looks of loathing, and again he heard, above the rattle of the wheels, that ancient cry of hate, "The Jew! The Jew!"

They sat down beneath a tree on the side of a hill commanding a view of the town and the winding Shilka, up whose rapid current a steamer was now shouldering its way, leaving behind a trailing plume of black smoke of incredible size. They conversed in Russian for a while, Mordecai skilfully leading the dialogue, without any reference to the unpleasant incidents of the morning. When, however, Hardy arose at last to return to the shore, the Jew said:

"You have made great progress, my dear pupil. You will now be able to get along by yourself, or by the help of a Russian teacher, who does not know any English."

"I do not desire to make a change," replied Hardy, "I am more than satisfied with my present teacher."

"Nevertheless," insisted Baruch, "the time has come when it will be no longer safe for you to go on with me. I have wanted to speak of this for several days, but it has been so pleasant to me to have the society of a human being here in this country of wolves and dogs that I have not been able to bring myself to the point. Besides, I need the money that

you pay me. I greatly fear that another Jewish persecution is about to break out. I have seen the storm brewing for some time. If it were not for my old mother, for whose sake I came back to this accursed country, I would quietly leave. At any rate, there is no need of your becoming involved in our trouble, perhaps losing your life. The people do not understand your associating with me. It is even whispered that you are of Jewish descent."

Hardy laughed.

"My dear fellow," he said, "it is nobody's business whom I employ for a Russian teacher. I shall pursue the course that seems best to me, and I shall not allow these people to interfere with my private affairs. If necessary, we will warn the authorities that trouble is brewing."

Baruch sprang to his feet and looked over toward Stryetensk, his eyes blazing with hate.

"Oh, the authorities!" he cried, "do you know that the persecutions of the Jews in Russia are connived at by the authorities, and tolerated even by the czar himself? Could not the authorities, if they wished, uproot and dispel the superstitions that make the Jews hated and feared? The people of Russia are mere animals, ignorant and ferocious, and they do what they are told. But there will be a day of

reckoning for Unholy Russia. The God who opened the Red Sea for Israel; who led them through wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night; who talked with Moses in the burning bush; who was with His people of old in Nineveh; the God who has made Rothschild a king of kings; who inspired the brains of Solomon and Heine, the souls of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, and the heart of Montefiore,—He will make this rabble pay for the blood of His chosen race. All the miseries of the Pale and the Ghetto, all the degradation and suffering, the starvation, the blows, the massacre and pillage, are they not written down in the book of the Recording Angel? The old law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, was written for you, O Unholy Russia, and when your day of judgment comes your ruin will be more terrible than that of Babylon. Draw out the score, heap high the mountains of wrong, but be sure that the mills of God grind very fine, no matter how slowly they turn!"

As Mordecai said these words, something of the power of an ancient seer crept into his bearing, his red eyes flashed fire, his shabby cloak seemed the robe of a prophet, and his thin, hooked nose and Semitic features took on the dignity of the ancient and glorious race whose insignia they were.

Hardy arose. "We will walk back together, Mordecai," he said quietly.

On his return to the store he found awaiting him a letter from Moscow. It was addressed in Russian, but the epistle itself was written in French and bore at its head a princely crest. He trembled and his face paled as he turned back and glanced eagerly at the signature, "Elizabetha Romanovna."

"Mordecai," said he, "come early this evening. I am going to try to write a letter in Russian, and I shall want you to straighten it out for me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MYSTERIOUS KOREAN BOY

This was the letter of the Princess :

My dear Mr. Hardy :

You have no doubt heard, long ere this, of rescue from the ill-fated *Pushkin*. Your own ventures on the river, and your safe arrival at Stryetensk, are all known to me, through the kindness of the police. Believe me that I was disappointed to the verge of exasperation, on learning that it was not through your efforts that we were saved. Your heroism loses nothing in my eyes at the fact, and you had already done enough to establish yourself in my estimation as a very gallant noble gentleman. I hardly know how to thank so modest and self-effacing as yourself for all you have done for me. I can only repeat that I owe my life to you, and that I am deeply and eternally grateful. If you are ever in Moscow, I shall expect you to call on me at my house on the Boulevard Prechistenka,—any one can tell you where it is. I hope that your affairs will bring you here be

very long, that we may talk over our extraordinary experiences together. In the meantime, you must think of me as your very sincere and grateful friend,

ELIZABETHA ROMANOVNA.

Hardy read this letter over half a dozen times, and the oftener he read it, the more satisfaction it gave him. There was a certain delicacy in the expression of her gratitude, without any hint at reward other than the offer of her friendship, which betokened an entire appreciation of his character and understanding of his motives. He spent most of the day thumbing his English-Russian dictionary and composing his reply, which, being in a language in which he was as yet a novice, was somewhat stilted. This, in effect, is what he at last worked out :

Most Noble Lady :

I beg that you will no longer give a thought to the part which I played upon the Amur. To be of service to so charming and exalted a lady as yourself is a happiness and distinction which calls for no further reward. If I am, in addition, to be honored by your friendship, my recompense is far greater than my desert.

Very cordially yours,
FREDERICK COURTLAND HARDY.

Baruch, when he came in the evening, cast a critical eye over the letter and pronounced it excellent.

"Even as it is," he declared, "it would be possible for the lady to understand it, and she would not laugh. Nevertheless, there are two or three little alterations to be made,—you would scarcely call them corrections."

"You are polite as a Frenchman, Mordecai. Your 'two or three little alterations' have amounted to re-writing the whole thing. Now we will address the envelope. I think you had better do that, so as to get it exactly right. It goes to her Highness, the Princess Elizabetha Romanovna, Prechistenka Street, Moscow."

At the mention of this name, Baruch's face grew livid, and his eyes glowed with sudden hate.

"Romanovna!" he hissed, "of the Romanoffs of Moscow? I have good cause to hate and detest that name. That accursed house was most violent in the persecutions that resulted in the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow. They used all their influence to bring this about, because they coveted certain property owned by the Hebrews, which the latter refused to sell. A whole peaceful and industrious community was uprooted in a single night, driven from their homes and their vocations, ordered to leave with

their wives and families, their sick and their old, and to make shift as best they could, in the accursed Pale. My father, the trusted and honored cashier of a bank, with a salary of two thousand five hundred dollars a year, a position to which he had risen through twenty years of faithful service, was kicked out like a dog, and told to go. You can not realize what suffering all this led to. My father, reduced to menial tasks to support his family, died within six months of grief. I have small love for the blood of Romanoff. They are all insolent tyrants and oppressors."

"My dear Mordecai," replied Hardy, "believe me, your tale of wrong fills me with pity and indignation, and I do not wonder at the strength of your feelings. I have small doubt that all you say of the Romanoffs is true, with one exception. You must except the Princess, who is a sweet and noble lady, with as tender and as generous a heart as ever beat in a woman's breast."

The Jew made no reply, but quietly directed the envelope, and shortly after took his leave.

He had not been gone more than ten minutes, before Hardy heard a tap at the door of his room, and called, "Come in!" in Russian. Vasili entered in great excitement.

"Is the Jew here?" he asked. His manner bold, and he did not remove his hat.

"No," replied Hardy. "Why, what's the matter now? What do you want with him?"

"The people want him," cried Vasili, "the Christians. A Christian child has disappeared, and think the accursed Jews have sacrificed him. The thing has gone on long enough." Vasili was speaking Russian now. "Only last spring a Christian young man was found dead, murdered, and the police could not find out who did it. They laid it on the Jews. Who else could have done it? Would a Christian murder a Christian? Impossible! These things must stop. We are going to tear down the Jewish houses and the Jewish store. If we do find the child, we will kill every Jew in Stryet. We will tear their children to pieces!"

With this, Vasili rushed from the room. He gazed for some moments, in silent astonishment at the closed door through which his clerk had disappeared.

"This is getting serious," he muttered at last. "It may even result in serious consequences to the store."

Up to this moment he had not been able to read that human beings, many of whom could read

write, could be capable of such fanaticism, or that credence in the medieval superstition of child-sacrifice could still exist. The thought that he was alone here in the midst of this irresponsible population gave him uneasiness as to his own safety. He wondered how generally the report was circulated that he himself was a Jew, and the suspicion crept through his mind that perhaps Vasili was responsible for it. Could it be possible that the Russian cherished ambitions of being made manager? Hardy looked at his pistol and determined, if it became necessary, to defend himself. But as for Baruch, would it be possible to do anything for him? There were, he remembered, about a dozen Jewish families in town, whose residences were clustered together in one quarter, while the house in which Baruch dwelt with his aged mother was at some distance from these. Perhaps it would be possible to reach Mordecai before the Christians got there and warn him. If necessary, he would offer the Jew the shelter of the store. He seized his hat and went out into the dimly-lighted street. He had gone only a short distance when a boy stopped him with a detaining hand. Hardy looked down and his eyes fell on a Korean youth. He knew instantly that it was a Korean from the costume: baggy trousers, loose

blouse and hat of bamboo frame covered with hair-cloth.

“Ten thousand pardons, ‘Excellency,” said the boy in imperfect Russian, “I came to see if you could give me employment. I have been in town only two days, and must have work. I can run errands or carry packages. I shall be very useful to you,—you don’t know how useful and industrious I shall be! And I am intelligent, too, very, very intelligent!”

The plea was so ingenuous, the young voice so eager, that Hardy was touched.

“I am in a great hurry now, my boy,” he said. “Be here when I come back, and I will talk with you. We could use an errand boy. I was thinking of that very thing to-day!”

“But, Excellency,” persisted the boy, “perhaps I can be of use to you now. You will see how intelligent I am!” He spoke rapidly, and his Russian, though bristling with errors, was easily understood. “Hoping to get employment of you and to become useful, I have made inquiries. The people here hate you, and they are thirsting for the blood of the Jews. They will kill and maim,—perhaps they will begin to-night and your life will be in danger. Whatever your errand is, let me go on it. Do you believe in God? Perhaps God sent me to you!”

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Hardy stood for a moment in deep thought.

"You are a very bright boy," he said at last. "I really believe you could do this thing better than I. Run then to the Jewish quarter and see what is going on. Then hasten to the house of Mordecai Baruch,—do you know where it is?"

"Yes, Excellency. You passed there this morning with him, and he went in."

"Well! You have been shadowing me. Tell Mordecai to bring his mother to my store, if they are in real danger, and I will try to protect them. The Russians will hardly dare to attack American property. Then run back to me as fast as you can."

"Yes, Excellency."

The boy was gone, and Hardy, after watching his slender form as it flew down the street until it disappeared around the corner, turned and reentered the store. Removing his coat and hat, he sat down at his table, and awaited the boy's return. The more he thought of this occurrence, the stranger it seemed to him. Seldom had he acted so purely on impulse as in the present instance. But the boy had come up to him so suddenly, he was so quick-witted and his proposition so sensible, that there was no resisting him. Hardy had heard that the Koreans were a bright race, naturally, but never before had he re-

ceived personal evidence of the fact. He now concluded that they compared favorably in this respect with the precocious Japanese.

In less than half an hour the boy was back. The housekeeper brought him to the door of Hardy's living-room and admitted him. He had the girlish cast of features that had made it so difficult for Hardy to distinguish between the Korean boys and girls in Vladivostok. His hair was drawn up into a tight knot on top of his head, and his face, save for a livid scar across his right cheek and temple, was positively beautiful.

"Well?" said Hardy.

"The worst is happening," said the boy quietly. "The wolves are howling and have already smelled blood. They are maddened by the scent of it. They are demolishing the Jewish houses, are stealing their valuables and burning their furniture. A number of the Jews are barricaded in the Jewish store, and a great crowd is collected in front, howling for blood. Mordecai and his mother have disappeared."

"My God!" exclaimed Hardy. "I must go immediately to the police."

"It will do no good," said the boy, "the chief of the police has left town and the police themselves are assisting in the work of destruction. Your own

life, unless you use great discretion, will be in danger. It is rumored that you are a friend and associate of Jews, perhaps a Jew yourself. I tore this from a wall."

He laid on a table a poster bearing a crude wood-cut of the Saviour's head, wearing the crown of thorns. Beneath were the words:

"Death to those who murdered our Lord!"

Hardy arose and paced the floor, his hands in his pockets. From time to time he stopped and listened, but all was silence without.

"Had you not better fly while you can?"

It was the voice of the boy, whose presence he had for the moment forgotten.

"Fly? No! I came here to stay, and whoever attempts to interfere with me will find that he has caught a Tatar and no Jew. What is your name?"

"Wang, Excellency."

"Wang what?"

"Just Wang."

"Well, Wang, you are a good boy, and I shall find you a place to sleep. I can make use of you. Hello, what's that? Do you not hear something?"

They both listened.

"Yes, sir, I hear the feet of a man running, as if for his life, and hoarse shouts in the distance."

CHAPTER XXIX

“WAR, MY BOY, WAR!”

Hardy ran through the large principal room of the store, lighted by a single kerosene lamp with reflector, to the street door. This he opened and began to shove up the iron shutter. He had not raised it more than two feet when Mordecai glided through beneath it and slammed it down again. He was chattering with fright. Even by that dim light Hardy could see that the Jew's face was the color of wax and that his eyes were dilated with horror.

“Save me! Save me!” he pleaded hoarsely, as he fumbled at the big key with trembling fingers, vainly trying to lock the door.

“Hark!” he whispered, “the Christians are after me! Do you not hear them howling like wolves? They will tear me to pieces!”

And, indeed, at that moment the sound of savage voices could be heard, louder and louder as they came nearer, shrieking, barking, howling:

"Moschke! Moschke! The Jew! The Jew!"

Mordecai sank to the floor and threw his arms about Hardy's knees.

"Save me, save me! and I will be your slave."

Hardy seized the man by his shoulders, shook him roughly and pulled him to his feet.

"Get up, man," he said quietly, "and pull yourself together. I will do all I can for you. Wang, take him away from the door,—take him back into the store. They may hear him here."

"Yes! Yes!" chattered Mordecai, "I will hide. Hide me, boy, hide me! I have money, I will make you rich!"

The shouting without had suddenly ceased. Absolute silence, more dangerous and terrible than noise, prevailed. Hardy stood listening, with only a wall and a door between himself and the Middle Ages.

He must outwit this mob, somehow, he did not see exactly how. He hardly believed that it would demolish the store as it had the property of the Jews. There must be some one among those maddened fanatics to tell them that this was American property, to suggest possible retribution in case they made a mistake. Hardy was glad now that he had made such progress in Russian. At least, he

would be able to understand better what was going on and to make himself understood.

And still that mysterious, portentous silence without! Could it be possible that Vasili was admitting the Russians through the back door? Could the man be so blind to his own interests as that? Were they quietly setting fire to the building?

There was a sudden crash, a loud hammering on the iron shutter. Evidently the Russians had been whispering together, and this sign of momentary hesitation gave Hardy reassurance.

"What do you want?" he shouted through the door.

"The Jew! The Jew!" came back the response in a roar.

"Wait a moment!" he called back. "I will come out and talk to you."

Even yet he had no clear plan in mind, save the general idea that he must parley with this people. It was all-important to gain time, that their passion might subside. Perhaps, if he could get them to arguing, their fury would wear itself out in words. Possibly he might say something that would deter them from further outrages.

There was a garret, reached by a ladder. A window faced the street and from this he determined to

parley with the mob. He ran toward the ladder, but was stopped by Wang, who glided up to him.

"I have an idea," said the boy. "Are there no priests' robes in the store?"

Hardy gazed at him for a moment, and then sudden comprehension seized him.

"Good!" he cried, "good!"

Springing to a counter he jerked down a long priest's robe and tall hat. Mordecai was crouching between bales of cloth. From these Hardy dragged him forth.

"Here, man," he commanded, "put these on and go out by the back door and walk hurriedly away! Walk all night, then throw them away. You will be safe as soon as you are out of Stryetensk. Come, come, man, hold out your arms! There! It's your only chance. Here, put on the hat and let me hang this cross about your neck. When you hear me talking to the mob, let him out of the back door, Wang. Go with the boy, I tell you, man. The mob will be in here soon. Good-by! and good luck!"

He seized the terrified man's hand, which was cold and limp as the hand of a dead man, and then scrambled up the ladder. The uproar without had commenced again, and the pounding on the door was being renewed.

He threw open the shutter of the window and looked out. There were at least five hundred people in the crowd, many of whom were carrying flaming torches, which they held high above their heads. All ages were represented, from babes in the arms of mothers to old men and bewhiskered countrymen in blouses and high boots. Hardy noticed several policemen in the throng, as well as two or three priests.

"There he is!" shouted some one, and the cry went up:

"The Jew! The Jew! Throw him out to us. Let us in to him!"

"What do you want of him?" asked Hardy.

"We want to play with him!" came the reply, followed by horrid, cruel laughter.

"Friends," said Hardy, "you must be careful what you do here. This is not Jewish property. It belongs to an American, a Christian,—Frederick Emery, a good man, whom we all know."

Hardy did not realize till that moment how much Russian he knew. He felt that he could have talked Chinese, had it been necessary.

"We do not want to destroy the property. We want the Jew, Mordecai. Pitch him out to us."

"No," said a tall Russian, who seemed to be a

ringleader. "We do not want to destroy the property, but we will burn it to the ground if you do not give up the Jew. The Jews must die. They crucified our Saviour, they sacrifice Christian children."

"But I assure you, good friends," argued Hardy, "that Mordecai had nothing to do with crucifying the Saviour. That happened two thousand years ago."

"He is making sport of us!" howled the mob.

"He is a Jew himself!"

"Tell us," sneered the tall man, "are you a Jew?"

"I am not a Jew," replied Hardy firmly. "I am a Christian. There is not a drop of Hebrew blood in my veins."

"Then prove it to us. It has been said that you are a Jew. If you are a Christian, you will throw out the Jew, that we may tear him in pieces, that we may beat him to death. Act quickly, for we must have the Jew!"

And again that awful cry went up.

"The *Moschke!* The *Moschke!* The Jew! The Jew!"

Hardy felt a light touch on his arm, and Wang whispered to him:

"He is gone, he has got away!"

"Friends," said Hardy in a calm, clear voice, "I

can not meet your test. There is no Jew here. I give you my word that Mordecai is not here."

Vasili now stood out from the others.

"Mr. Hardy," he said, "we saw him run in this direction. We are sure he was coming here. Where else could he seek protection, save in the house of his companion and friend?" This sneeringly.

"Do you doubt my word, sir?" asked Hardy. "You had better help me in this trying situation, if you know on which side your bread is buttered. This is your opportunity to win Mr. Emery's favor."

"I do not doubt your word, sir, but these people will be hard to convince."

"I saw the Jew go into the store!" shrieked a boy. "He crawled under the iron door."

"He is lying to us," howled the mob. "Beat in the door. Death to the Jew! to the Jew!"

Pandemonium now broke loose again. Heavy rocks were hurled against the doors and windows, and three or four stout Russians brought up a log to batter in the iron shutter.

"Oh, my dear master," pleaded the Korean boy "fly while there is yet time! They will kill you, they will tear you in pieces! They are madmen!"

"I shall not fly," said Hardy. "They may kill me, if they wish, but I will teach them a lesson first."

At this moment a droshky drove up through the throng, the driver furiously lashing his horses, and stopped before the door.

A corpulent man with white side whiskers sat in it. He wore an American fall overcoat, of the latest cut and a derby hat.

"What's the matter here, friends?" he asked, standing up in the carriage. He spoke perfect, fluent Russian. There was no fear in his face, his voice, or his attitude. A sudden hush fell on the throng.

"If you please, Mr. Emery," said the tall Russian, who had acted as ringleader, "we want the Jew who is being sheltered in the store. Another Christian child has been sacrificed, and we are punishing the Jews. We want Mordecai, and if this man in the window is a Jew, we want him, too."

"He a Jew?" laughed Emery. "He is as good a Christian as any man amongst you. Do you think that I would have sent a Jew here to take charge of my store? Do you not know me better than that?"

"We thought so because he associated with a Jew constantly, in preference to Christians," said the ringleader.

"How is that, Mr. Hardy?" asked Emery, "what explanation have you to make to these good people?"

"I hired the Jew to teach me Russian," said

Hardy. "He was the only man in town who spoke English sufficiently well."

"Ah, do you see? Do you see?" cried old Emery unctuously, waving a conciliatory arm in the air. "He made use of the Jew that he might learn the beautiful language of Holy Russia and thus become able to converse with you, his friends and neighbors, my friends and neighbors. I see it all!" Here Mr. Emery opened both palms and extended them over the crowd. "He, no doubt, kept the Jew constantly with him, that he might learn the language as soon as possible and thus get rid of him at the earliest moment compatible with his laudable purpose. You see what astounding progress he has made. I could hardly believe my ears when I heard my friend speaking Russian so well. Mr. Hardy, is there a Jew concealed in the store?"

"*Nyet*," replied Hardy.

"He says 'No,' and that convinces me. Nevertheless, you shall come in and see for yourselves, and if you find a Jew here, I will agree to eat him, without pepper or salt. Mr. Hardy, come down and open the door."

Hardy complied with the request, and Emery, jumping briskly from the carriage, entered, calling out cheerfully:

“Vladimar, Anatoli, Sergei, come in and look about, and then you shall take out a barrel of vodka and all the friends shall drink to my safe return to Holy Russia.”

The three men entered shamefacedly, protesting that they would take Mr. Emery’s word as to the Jew, but he slapped them one by one heartily on the back, shouting:

“Come in, brothers, come in!”

Twenty minutes later they went out with a barrel of vodka, announcing:

“Christians, there is no Jew here. Let us drink to the health of Frederick Emery!”

The mob dispersed.

“Well!” exclaimed old Emery, as he slammed down the iron shutter, “what in the devil does all this mean?”

“It means,” explained Hardy, “that there has been a massacre of Jews, and that Mordecai, whom I employed to teach me Russian, fled here for shelter. Wang, here, my Korean errand boy, and I disguised him as a priest and sent him about his business.”

“Good!” exclaimed Emery, “good! Blamed clever!” He sprang to his feet and paced the store. He was an excitable man. “But I got here just in time. I came up on the *Ingoda*. Those blood-

thirsty devils might have set fire to the store and perhaps have killed you. I think I'll stay here for a month or so, and help you out. My boy, I have great news! Good news! Glorious news!" Here he jumped upon the counter, and, sitting there, looked triumphantly at Hardy, pulling fiercely meanwhile at his side whiskers.

"What is it?" asked Hardy.

"War, my boy, war, between Russia and Japan!"

"And do you call that good news?"

"Yes, for merchants, for commerce. I fear you haven't acquired the commercial spirit yet, my boy. Big contracts, tremendous sales, high prices. An unparalleled demand for everything on earth. Business! business! business, till you can't rest,—that's what war means! We'll have tremendous shipments of goods sent over to Vladivostok, and every steamer that comes up the river bringing them to our stores. It'll be a big war, a great big war, for little Japan is going to give Russia the fight of her life!"

"Do you think so?" asked Hardy wonderingly.

"Do you think Japan will be able to stand up against Russia?"

"Stand up against her!" shouted Emery. "Why, she'll make her tremble to the very foundations. My

ends out there will have something besides Jew-
iting to attend to when that war breaks out. I've
en in Japan, looking the ground over, and I know
hat I'm talking about. Did you ever see a mother-
it pounce on a big clumsy dog? Well, Japan is a
hole nation of wildcats, thirty million wildcats,
id Russia is the clumsiest kind of a clumsy dog."

"By the way," said Hardy, "I wonder what be-
me of Mordecai's mother? I forgot all about her
the excitement."

"The Christians killed her," said Wang, who was
inding in the shadow.

"Hello!" exclaimed Emery, "that boy of yours
eaks Russian. And blamed well, too!"

CHAPTER XXX

HARDY HESITATES

Emery stayed on in Stryetensk, lengthening his visit into months, and Hardy became greatly attached to him, finding the companionship of this cheerful, bold, resourceful, self-made man an inspiration which the fellowship of his former society friends had never afforded him. The old merchant received frequent advices from his agent in Japan which confirmed him in the belief that war was imminent, and Stryetensk, at the head of river navigation in Siberia, seemed to him the most important of the company's posts in Russia.

"They'll be rushing great armies to the front as soon as the war breaks out, my boy," he said frequently. "It will tax all the resources of the empire to defend Port Arthur, Manchuria, even Vladivostok; and even after the railroad is completed, they will send supplies down the river."

"But the river freezes in winter," objected Hardy. Emery laughed.

"It will take this country more than one summer to whip Japan, and then the Japanese won't know they're licked."

Under Emery's direction, Hardy obtained a conception of the possibilities of commerce on a grand scale, and much of the older man's enthusiasm entered into his blood. Emery, on the other hand, frequently declared that his young associate had the "making of a great merchant in him," and came more and more to intrust him with important matters and to rely on his judgment.

Vasili, who was suspected of having been active in exciting popular hatred against Hardy, whom he regarded as having supplanted him, was transferred to Blagovestchensk. And during all this time the Korean boy, whose intelligence and adaptability were truly marvelous, steadily grew in favor with his employers. His progress in Russian was phenomenal, and as it transpired that he also knew Japanese and some Chinese, he was, after a couple of months, promoted from errand boy to the office, and set to writing letters.

In the meanwhile Hardy received another letter from the Princess Romanovna, a chatty, delightful letter, in Russian this time, complimenting him on his progress in the language, and telling him much

of her own life and of affairs in Moscow. Among other things, she mentioned the fact that she had spoken of his heroism on the Amur to the emperor and of the debt of gratitude that she owed him. She assured him that she would be glad to hear from him from time to time and signed herself, "Your friend, Elizabetha Romanovna."

The cold Siberian winter came on, but Hardy, who had dreaded it, found it enjoyable. The huge stoves, each of which was built through the wall and heated two rooms, kept the store warm, and the great fur overcoat with which he provided himself proved ample protection against the zero weather out of doors.

The country was indescribably beautiful, too, during this season, when the bright sun glittered on the stretches of snow, and the droshkies dashed madly through the streets, shaking music from their jingling bells; or at night, when the enormous moon, scarcely less brilliant than the sun, shone over the great hilltops and the winding Shilka, now an icy highway for skaters and sledges.

In January, Emery announced to Hardy one day that he wished the young man to take a trip to Moscow and perhaps to St. Petersburg on business.

"You know the language so well now, my boy,

that you will be able to attend to this business as well as I. You aren't fluent in it, it is true, but you are particularly strong on commercial Russian. Let's see, when did you begin?"

"About the first of July, immediately after my arrival."

"Well, you have simply absorbed it through every pore of your body. Your enterprise in this particular is most commendable,—just the thing that old Tom Hardy, your father, would have done. I knew that I shouldn't make any mistake in you, if you had any of Tom Hardy's stuff in you. Blood tells. It's a fact that you can't get around. Now I shall want you to spend the next few days going over the things that we must round up. Go straight to Seltzer and Galanter in Moscow. I'll give you a letter to them. They'll be most useful to us in cornering the blanket market. We must corner the whole business!" shouted Emery, seizing his left mutton-chop in one fist while he brought the other down with tremendous emphasis on the table. "And saddles,—we must get the contract for supplying the army with American saddles. That will come later, because this fool government does not believe that Japan is going to fight. But we must lay pipes for contracts. It's easily done. Whoever can promise

the government contractors the biggest rake-off gets the order. And the secret of that is in supplying the cheapest goods at the highest prices. This country is rotten to the core. Corruption and speculation prevail everywhere. That simplifies business and makes it easy. You don't have to worry about the quality of the goods, the one essential is to attend to the purchasing official's rake-off. Now, in Japan, it's different. The system there is to get the best goods for the money, and even then they won't pay you if there's any way to get out of the bill. We are already selling supplies to the Japanese government—wheat and horses. Isn't commerce a glorious thing, my boy? It wastes no nerves nor time on silly sympathies, but fits out both sides with the munitions of war, and the better it keeps them supplied, the longer they can keep fighting, and the more supplies they need!"

Hardy smiled. The older man's enthusiasm, though infectious, had its element of grim humor.

"By the way," said Hardy, stammering slightly and feeling a trifle confused, "there is a—ah—matter of which I wish to speak to you. You know this country so much better than I, and its customs. I have received an invitation from the Princess Romanovna to call on her while in Moscow."

It was a little difficult to speak to Emery on this subject, he was so practical and his gray eyes were so shrewd, and at times twinkled so humorously. Yet he was thoroughly kind-hearted, he loved Hardy, both for his own and for his father's sake, and he took a paternal interest in the young man.

"Is she the one whom you saved from Chinese brigands?"

"She is the—ah—the one whom I came up the Amur with," replied Hardy modestly.

"Well, go and call on her!" decided Emery, without a moment's thought.

"Yes, but I feel some little hesitation. She is a princess, and I am now a merchant, and we are in Russia. I don't want her to feel under the least obligation to me for what I have done. That is to say, I do not want her to feel that I am taking advantage of it. She means all right, but taking me up might cause her some little inconvenience or embarrassment. Her relatives are proud and haughty, and I don't belong to her social set."

"Social set be blanked!" roared Emery. "Haven't you got that Boston tommy-rot out of your head yet? You're an American gentleman, and an American gentleman is good company for any princess that walks the surface of the globe. Besides, if you

stay with me and this war goes right, I'll make a merchant-prince out of you, my boy, and those are the only princes these days."

"I gather, then, that you advise me to call on her?" said Hardy.

"That's what I do! She'll not be coming down any to receive the son of old Tom Hardy. Besides she asked you to come and see her, didn't she?"

"Certainly, but—"

"There are no buts about it. A woman's a woman and a man's a man, and the artificial distinctions of so-called civilization are not even skin-deep. It would be a great thing for the firm if one of its members were to marry a princess," added the old man reflectively.

"Oh," cried Hardy, suddenly flushing, "there's no possibility of anything of that sort! I hope I am not so cad enough to give you the idea that I think the Princess is in the least interested in me in that way. I assure you that I know positively that she isn't."

One week later, in the middle of January, Frederick Courtland Hardy crossed Lake Baikal to Irkutsk and there took the magnificent "*train luxur*," a nine-days' railway journey to Moscow. Though he was going on important business, yet he felt strangely agitated over the fact that he was soon to

see the Princess again. With the agitation, too, was mingled a certain degree of misgiving and foreboding. He was not sure that his seeing her would conduce to his peace of mind.

He was accompanied by his secretary, Wang, the Korean boy, who had rendered himself indispensable through his genius for details.

CHAPTER XXXI

OFF TO MOSCOW

Hardy never forgot that journey to Moscow. For days the heavy train rolled slowly along through a vast park covered with illimitable stretches of snow, or through leafless, naked forests, shivering in the cold blasts of winter. All the trains that passed were crowded with emigrants, bound for the Amur region, and the car windows were thronged with the fresh, innocent faces of children. To many of the trains, prison cars were attached, bearing their sorrowful freight to the dread island of Saghalin, which has taken the place of Siberia, as a land for deportation. From the windows of these cars, also, many children looked out, pressing their little faces against the bars, for the condemned are allowed to take their families with them. Hardy had long since realized that he was in Russia, the Russia of the story-books and the magazine articles.

That he was in Holy Russia, too, he was not al-

lowed to forget, for there were shrines and icones of Christ, of the Virgin and of different saints in all the railroad stations, and before these his fellow passengers often crossed themselves, or purchased and lighted some of the candles to be had for a copeck or two apiece.

Occasionally, too, a traveling church, built on the bed of a railway-car, would pass, trailing at the end of a train. These churches were gorgeous with much fretwork, tinsel and gold, and through the open doors could be seen the showy glass pendants of hanging chandeliers, the yellow blinking of lighted candles and the gleaming of polished icon frames. These churches, Hardy learned, were commercial ventures, conducted by the priests in charge, who took religion about the country very much as a patent-medicine man takes the wares he sells from his painted wagon. On and on the train rolled tirelessly, night and day, through the land of the czar, the great wood-burning engine breathing steadily, rather than puffing. They crossed the broad Yenisei, with its iron bridge, at night, while the electric lights of Krasnoyarsk glittered in the distance like a cluster of stars; over rolling stretches, snow-white, they undulated, to the river Tom, which they passed at ten in the morning; then on through the country of

the Kirghiz, the land growing more and more hilly, to the arrowy Om and the wood-built city of Omsk.

They were nearing the frontier now, and Siberia, with its broad well-fenced fields, reminded Hardy of the western states of the Union.

Up and up they climbed steadily into the picturesque Urals, until at last they passed a stone monument on the left of the track, and Hardy knew that they had left Asia behind and were in Europe. As they stopped at the various brownish-yellow stations, he saw frequent gangs of buxom, pretty girls marching down the track with long rakes or brooms resting on their shoulders, or engaged in cleaning the rails of snow and litter. These girls wore red waists and over their heads handkerchiefs of bright color, making a vivid picture against the white background of snow.

Villages now became frequent. First the gleaming dome of a church would be seen a long distance off, and then the cluster of squalid straw-thatched huts about it, and perhaps a row of picturesque wind-mills, for grinding grain.

Then came the stately Volga with its mile-long bridge, pouring the Ural snows into the Caspian's mighty urn.

One evening a little before sunset, they came in

sight of Moscow,—an indistinct blur of houses, out of which loomed large and clear the towers and domes of numerous churches, many of them overlaid with gold-leaf, and glittering gorgeously in the light of the setting sun.

At eight the train drew up in the modern and commodious station at Moscow, and the American, as he looked about him, felt that he was in the heart of European civilization once more.

Wang, who was invaluable through his ready wit and his knowledge of Russian, attended to the baggage and engaged a sledge to take his employer to the Slaviansky Bazar, or hotel, the best caravan-sary in the city, and a very sumptuous and comfortable inn, as it proved.

The mad life and gaiety of the town, the evidence of wealth and pleasure, the lights sparkling on the snow, the laughter of the magnificently-dressed women in the innumerable sledges dashing here and there, the crashing and jingling of bells,—all these things thrilled Hardy and made his heart beat faster as he drove to the hotel.

She, the Princess, was one of the richest of the rich, one of the most aristocratic of all the aristocrats of this brave town, he reflected, and he looked eagerly into the sledges as they passed in an end-

less stream, if perchance he might see the haughty, laughing, high-bred face he knew so well; if perhaps he might pass her here, as he had done on the streets of Vladivostok.

All the fashion and wealth of Moscow seemed to be out this crystal-clear, biting evening.

Should he see her, would she recognize him? Would that superb, fearless, handsome and unprincipled animal, Boris Romanoff, be by her side, chatting gaily and intimately? The first three adjectives passed through Hardy's mind in justice to the man, but he could not resist adding the last in justice to himself, and he felt a sharp twinge of pain grip his heart,—the fingers of jealousy,—though he would not have liked to acknowledge the sensation by that name.

The certainty that Romanoff had been with her all this time, passing his evenings with her, taking her to the theater or to drive, or meeting her at social gatherings, gave him acute discomfort, and he realized sharply, as he drove along in his hired sledge, that he was in Russia and engaged in commerce. He decided, before reaching the hotel, that perhaps he would not call, after all; that it would be foolish for him to do so.

"If I should become infatuated with her," he mut-

tered, "I should only make myself the more miserable by seeing her again."

For several days he devoted his entire attention to business, conferring with merchants and going over lists, prices and accounts with Wang. Meanwhile, whenever he went into the street, the interminable procession of sledges was there, and he watched them constantly, always with one face in his mind,—that graceful head held so high, with its crown of hair the color of ripe wheat and fine as spider threads. Many ladies of pure Russian type he saw, their faces peeping saucily from collars and hoods of costly fur, and often he would start and his heart would throb more violently as he thought he recognized the Princess. He would generally realize his mistake, however, before the sledge would dash by with its jangling bells.

But on one or two occasions he was not quite sure, and he would glance back at the sledge flying down the street in a flurry of snow-spray, wondering if indeed he had again looked into the eyes of his fair fellow passenger of the *Pushkin*.

He was more easily deceived because there was a striking general resemblance among the faces, owing to the prevalence of the Moscow type, insisted on by the poet Griboyedoff, in his charming comedies.

He would have gone away without calling on her had he finished his business as quickly as the original plan contemplated, but old Emery, who had come up as far as Irkutsk, kept writing to him, sending new commissions. Emery, by the way, was becoming jubilant. The diplomatic relations between Russia and Japan were growing less cordial every day; the demands of the latter country were waxing more and more insistent and difficult to evade. The Japanese, too, according to Emery's advices, were rushing preparations for a death-grapple with the Bear on a gigantic scale.

"This means war, my boy," wrote the old man, "and war means business!"

So Hardy worked away, enlarging his acquaintance with the Moscow merchants, while his respect for the magnitude of their operations and for the greatness of the city's industries steadily grew.

And one evening, as he walked home to his hotel, he saw the Princess Romanovna. There was no mistake about it this time, and he realized that, when it was indeed she, there could be no mistake. She was leaning back in a sledge with high curving dash, luxuriously piled with skins. On an elevated seat in front sat her coachman and footman, the former directing the energies of four milk-white steeds,

whose tails were tied in knots, but whose long manes streamed wildly in the wind. Two of these horses were running free, and, thus untrammelled, the beauty and grace of their movements was a sight to be remembered for a lifetime. The Princess wore a white round cap of fur, and her cheeks, deliciously reddened by the excitement and the keen teeth of the wind, were snuggled in the soft collar of a white fur cloak. Hardy noticed, with a thrill of distinct pleasure, that no man, but an older woman, accompanied her.

And the Princess saw Hardy. As he arrested his steps at the edge of the curb and gravely lifted his hat, she bowed and, leaning forward, touched the coachman and called to him. The horses came to a sudden stop, rearing upon their haunches and plunging and slipping in a wild jumble. Presently they stopped and stood trembling. The sledge drew up to the curb.

“Why, Mr. Hardy!” exclaimed the Princess in Russian, “I had no idea that you were in Moscow. How long have you been here?”

“A little over two weeks.”

“Over two weeks and have not been to call on me! I do not consider that kind. Madame Prebioff, this is Mr. Hardy, the American whom I told you about,

who rescued me from the Chinese brigands, and performed such feats of valor on the Shilka. I do not see why he ever rescued me at all, if he does not think me worth calling on."

"The Princess has talked constantly of you," said Madame Prebioff; "half the young men in Moscow are waiting to challenge you. Hearing of your wonderful skill, they have all taken to practising with the pistol. The proprietors of the galleries are getting rich, and one can scarcely sleep nights on account of the constant popping."

The Princess laughed merrily. "You are positively incorrigible, Anna," she said. "But,"—turning to Hardy,—“tell me why you have not been to see me? What excuse have you to offer, sir?"

"I should have called before I left, to pay my respects," said Hardy bravely. "I have been very busy. I am here on business, you know, for the American Trading Company, buying up stock for their posts on the Amur. I—ah, had not expected to devote much attention to society."

"Mr. Hardy is a merchant then?" inquired Madame Prebioff languidly. "How very interesting!"

The Princess' eyes flashed dangerously, but she made no reply to Madame Prebioff.

"But even if you are busy," she said, "you can

spare a little time for your friends. Will you not call on me to-morrow evening? I shall be quite alone, and we can talk over our wonderful adventures together. Come at eight."

The horses, stung by the cold, were becoming unmanageable now and were plunging and rearing.

"I shall be most happy," said Hardy.

"Au revoir, then," said the Princess, "I shall expect you."

She spoke to the *isvoschik*, and the sledge, with a sudden crash and a rhythmical jangle of bells, flew down the street. The American, with head uncovered, stood looking after it.

CHAPTER XXXII

HARDY ENGAGES A CABMAN

"How do I look, Wang?" Hardy asked of his Korean boy, who was sitting in the room of their suite at the hotel that did duty as an office. Wang glanced up from the pile of correspondence with which he was busy.

"You look like a gentleman," he replied quietly.

"Thanks," said Hardy, who was in evening dress. "I am glad you think so, for the costume which I am now wearing was invented to convey the impression that a man is either a gentleman or a waiter, though it has, first and last, it must be confessed, covered the back of an occasional coward or clown. It is necessary for me to-night to look the gentleman, my boy," he added whimsically, "for I am going to mingle with the *haute noblesse*. The merchant of Stryetensk, Wang, is on his way to the palace of the Romanoffs!"

Wang smiled. "Once a gentleman, always a

gentleman," he replied. "There are many among the drunken, licentious and cowardly nobility of Russia who are less worthy to enter palaces than the merchant of Stryetensk!"

Hardy laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

"You look pale, my boy," he said kindly. "You are working too hard. Put these away now and go to bed, or, here,—take this and go to the theater,"—and he laid a gold piece on the table. Wang flushed and handed the money back.

"If I go to the theater," he said with considerable spirit, "I can buy my own ticket."

Hardy's finer feelings prevented him from smiling.

"Pardon me, Wang," he said, restoring the money to his pocket. "I did not mean to offer you charity; merely a reward for exceptional attention to duty. But I must be going. The Princess said eight and it's nearly that now. Don't work any more to-night."

He was gone.

"The Princess!" muttered Wang, jabbing the pen, with which he had been writing, so spitefully into the table that he shattered its point. "The haughty, lemon-haired Princess,—and she wants nothing of him save to amuse herself! He has saved

her life and now she will repay him by breaking his heart. I could kill her!"

Having given vent to this ebullition of seeming jealousy, Wang proceeded to illustrate still further the feminine nature of Korean boys, for he rested his hand on his arms and sobbed for some moments violently. After which he twisted his neck about and kissed the spot upon his shoulder where his master's hand had rested.

Hardy, meanwhile, slipping into a long ulster, the fur collar of which he turned up about his ears, left the hotel and stepped to the edge of the sidewalk. A droshky dashed up immediately.

"The Princess Romanovna," said he in Russian. "The Princess Romanovna, in the street—"

The *isvoschik* jumped down with alacrity extraordinary for a Russian.

"The Princess Romanovna?" he inquired, looking shrewdly at Hardy.

"Yes," said Hardy, "in the street—"

"Get in," said the Russian, "and I will drive you there immediately. I know where it is."

There was something strange in the man's manner, so strange, in fact, that it set the American wondering. He acted as though he had been sent for his fare, or had been expecting him. But Hardy

did not long dwell on this idea, for he was, after all, on his way to the Princess. He would soon be in her presence again, and the thought so agitated him, so set his heart to beating, that all other matters were driven from his mind. He realized now, more strongly than ever before, that he was too deeply interested in her for his peace of mind, and he had seen enough of the customs of the country to lead him to believe that there was no hope of winning her hand. Old Emery's dictum that a princess is but a woman afforded him little comfort. There was a vast difference, he reflected, if one is a Russian princess, between marrying a tradesman and being kind to a man who has saved your life. If there were any chance for him, he would go in and win, to use an American expression, and if he failed, he would take his medicine like a man. But this going to see her, under the circumstances, was only folly. It would make it the harder for him when it became necessary for him to go back to the store. Not that he admitted to himself any social inferiority. He was too good an American for that. He was taking into account the education and training of the Princess, and their probable effect on the situation. This falling in love is a serious business and a hopeless affection may wreck a man's life.

As these thoughts were running through Hardy's mind, it occurred to him from time to time that it took a long while to reach the palace of the Princess. He knew about where it was located, though he had not visited the spot. It should have taken him fifteen minutes to drive there from the hotel. He consulted his watch and found that he had been half an hour on the road.

"Cabmen," he muttered, "are the same the world over. The fellow is driving me about for a while in order to increase the size of the bill."

He was on the point of opening the door and shouting to the *isvoschik*, when the latter drew up before a large, square house on a quiet, poorly-lighted street. Hardy threw open the door and jumped out.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE NIHILISTS' DEN

"So here we are at last!" he said; "wait for me." The house as he glanced up at it did not impress him as a palace, but he reflected that some of the older and more exclusive of the Muscovite nobility lived in antiquated and unpretentious residences. The *isvoschik* ran up the steps by his side and rang the bell. An old woman opened the door.

"Ah," she said to the cabman, "so you have brought him!"

"*Da! da!*" replied the Jehu, and trudged down the steps.

It was evident to Hardy that he was expected at the house of the Princess, that even the servants had been told to keep on the lookout for him. Probably this cabman had been sent for him. Hardy had been shown into a small reception-room, where a coal fire was burning in the grate. A couple of easy chairs and a leather-covered lounge, somewhat

worn, formed the only furniture, rather meager, it seemed to him, for the palace of a princess. He removed his coat and sat down before the fire. As the old woman had been expecting him, it was safe to assume that she had gone to inform Romanovna of his arrival. He arose, and with fingers that trembled slightly, arranged his white tie in a mirror over the mantle. As he was thus engaged, he could hear two men talking, probably in the hall, just outside the door.

“It is the most wonderful explosive ever invented,” said one.

“Enough to fill the inside of a child’s ball is quite sufficient to wreck the czar’s palace—”

“Curse him!” interjected the other.

“Amen! It can therefore be thrown to a great distance, and wherever it strikes, it explodes. There is no missing fire. Several members of the Order witnessed a trial of it in the Ural Mountains, in a lonely spot, and the results were most satisfactory. A small quantity, hurled at the base of a cliff, tore the whole face of the mountain loose. One of the brethren accidentally dropped a sphere of it, and he simply disappeared—vanished from the face of the earth. One of his arms was found two miles from the place, lying beside a mountain road.”

"That would be good medicine for the czar," hunched a third voice.

"Yes, and for tyrants in general. With this new and mysterious explosive, the Order has an agency by which it can become a terror to the ruling classes, by which it can demoralize society, and make way for the new order of things, the divine brotherhood of man. In six months from now, there will not be a man living in Russia who will dare set himself up above his fellow creatures, or take his seat on the tyrant-throne of Russia. To-night we shall select the brother who will throw the first sphere."

"But is it not fortunate," asked the second speaker, "that a member of the Enemies of Russia should have made this important discovery? The brother, Felix Hulin, is here—a slender, dark man with eye-glasses. The cabman that we sent brought him and he is now in the reception-room. Ah, but he has the air of a deep student! Let us go in and make him welcome."

Hardy, still fumbling with his tie, caught sight of his own face in the mirror, and was startled by its expression. It was the face of a man caught in a trap and who has only a moment to escape before he is discovered.

He was in a nihilists' den and had overheard a

plot to kill the czar. If it should be discovered that he was an impostor, he had little doubt as to what his fate would be. He seized his coat and hat and started toward the door. Three men entered, two well-dressed and the other evidently a laborer of some sort.

"Brother Hulin," said the tall man in imperfect French, "we welcome you among the Enemies of Russia. We know all about your marvelous discovery, and we consider you the greatest inventor of the age."

Hardy shook hands with them all with much cordiality.

"I was," he said, also in French, "hoping to make a little address to the brethren to-night, for which I have prepared notes. I see that I have left these notes at my hotel and I feel uneasy about them. If they should fall into the hands of the police, it would be a serious matter for all of us. I told my cabman to wait,—I will drive over to the hotel after them."

"Very well," said the tall man, "but don't be long, for there are many of the Order here who are anxious to meet you."

Hardy stepped toward the door with a light heart, but just as he reached for the knob, the bell rang, and one of the nihilists opened the door and admitted

the cabman with a slender, dark man who wore eye-glasses.

"I am Felix Hulin," announced the new arrival in perfect French, "and that man," pointing to Hardy, "is an impostor!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

The American, in immaculate evening dress, his crushed hat beneath his elbow and his fur-lined coat thrown over his arm, stood at bay with his back against the wall, silently eyeing the nihilists. The blood rushed back to his heart, and his cheeks paled a trifle, but the glance that he fixed on those wondering faces, in which hate and fear were beginning to dawn, showed no flinching. The cabman, in tall boots of patent leather, and shining silk hat, stood at the door, with his broad back against it, his whip in his hand. He was a thick-set, broad-shouldered muzhik, with little, red eyes, a red face, and a profuse red beard. His glance shifted uneasily from Hulin to Hardy.

By his side stood the little Frenchman, who sank his head between his shoulders like a turtle, and, stretching an accusing left arm toward Hardy, shrieked:

"I am Felix Hulin, I say, *mon Dieu!* the great inventor, the great benefactor of the human race. Behold, here is the proof! If I dash this little sphere on the floor, poof! b—r—r—r! The whole house will fall apart like a castle of cards, the roof will leap into the air, in one little second, by *gar*, we shall all be in eternity. Gentlemen, are you convinced? Sooner than have my word doubted, I shall give you the proofs. Ten thousand devils! I am Felix Hulin, I say, no man shall doubt me!"

He plunged his right hand into his pocket and drew forth a sphere, about the size of a base-ball, which he held in the hollow of his palm.

"I am Doctor Hulin," he added; "behold the pill which I have prepared for tyrants and spies!"

About twenty of the brethren had stolen into the hall and were pressing forward toward Hardy; stolen, indeed, for these men all moved silently, as though accustomed to secret and dangerous meetings. But at the dreaded word "spy," a murmur arose.

"A spy! A spy! Kill him, tear him to pieces!"

But the man who had welcomed Hardy in French stepped in front of them and raised his hand.

"Sh! Brethren," he commanded, "are you all mad? Would you have the police down on us?"

The spy is in our power, if indeed he is a spy, and we shall know how to deal with him, how to seal his lips. As for you, Brother Felix, do not drop your pill, in the Virgin's name! Put it in your pocket. Preserve it for tyrants and the foes of mankind. There! We shall breathe freer now. Ivan,"—to the cabman,—“what is the history of this man? How did you happen to bring him here?”

“I went to the Slaviansky Bazar to get a slender, dark man with eye-glasses,” he explained, “who should give me the password for the night—‘The Princess Romanovna.’ This man came out, hailed me, and gave me the password. I bring him here, and then, ten minutes later, along comes this other slender, dark foreigner with eye-glasses, who, it seems, is able to find his own way about! That is the truth, Brother Bielinski, I call the Virgin to witness,”—and the pious soul crossed himself.

“Very well,” said Bielinski, a tall man, stoop-shouldered, with thin, hook-nose and keen, furtive eyes. “Very well. May I ask, my friend,” turning to Hardy, “whether you are a member of the Brotherhood, and, if not, why are you here?”

“The explanation is very simple,” replied Hardy in French, in which language the question had been directed. “I am an American merchant, residing in

Stryetensk. I have an acquaintance with the Princess Romanovna, on whom I was about to call. I told the cabman to drive me to her residence, and he brought me here. I know nothing of your amiable Brotherhood, nor do I wish to learn anything." Here he took out his watch and consulted it coolly. "As we have no possible business together, I will now bid you good night, and proceed on my way. If I do not hasten I shall be too late for my call."

"But why does he not speak Russian?" asked Ivan. "He spoke to me in very good Russian."

"Do you understand Russian?" asked Bielinski.

"I speak it imperfectly," replied Hardy. "I have been in the country only a short time."

"You speak it well enough to understand," exclaimed Bielinski, "or you would not have made so shrewd an effort to get away. I am not sure now that you are not a spy. At any rate, it will be a long time before you will see your friend the Princess Romanovna."

Hardy noticed that the last two words were spoken with an emphasis of hate, which reminded him of the Christian voices at Stryetensk, spitting out "*Moschke! Moschke!* The Jew! The Jew!" Truly this Holy Russia is a breeding-ground for many violent hates.

"You will hardly dare retain an American who is as well known as I am," he said.

"We dare do anything in the interest of humanity and brotherhood," replied Bielinski loftily. "Brothers, retire silently into the council-chamber, till we decide what to do with the prisoner. You," to Hardy, "will come along with us. Make an outcry or resist and you are a dead man on the instant."

"I shall be a spectator of your interesting proceedings," replied Hardy, "since you insist. I am rather late for my engagement, now, and fear that I must defer it to another evening." Here he consulted his watch again. "Would you kindly request your friend with the pill not to walk so close to the wall? Should he rub against it too hard, the result might be unfair to me, who am neither a tyrant nor a spy."

They all moved silently down to the extreme end of the hall, and passed through a door into a large square room, furnished with chairs and divans and a round table, upon which were a number of books and magazines. Crossing this, they entered the council-chamber, a long, narrow apartment, with benches running around it, and a long table in the center, with chairs placed for about twenty people.

The Enemies of Russia seated themselves on

the benches and at the table. Bielinski, who was evidently the chairman, took his place at the head of the table. Felix Hulin, after taking the terrible sphere from his pocket and laying it carefully on the table on a tiny couch formed of his crumpled handkerchief, removed his coat and hung it upon a nail. He then took his seat, by invitation, at Bielinski's right.

"Brethren," said the latter, rising, "of the Society of the Enemies of Russia!" He spoke very distinctly, but not loud. The most absolute silence prevailed. "And by Russia we do not mean this land in which we live, this part of the earth, but the vile government which oppresses us. For what is a country, save a certain extent of the earth's surface which tyranny, under one guise or another, has selected as its own especial province for oppression? The nihilist, my friend, has no country—that is to say, no Russia, no France, no Germany. The whole world is his country, all mankind are his brothers. It is in this spirit that we have met to-night to welcome to our midst one of the greatest inventors of the age, the celebrated chemist, Felix Hulin, one of our brothers. He will explain to you the nature of his wonderful invention, which is to make thrones totter and tyrants tremble. I assure you that it is

all he will represent to you, as I have talked with one who witnessed his experiments in a lonely region of the Caucasus. He will make his speech in French, which I will undertake to translate for you into our own tongue. But first we must decide what to do with this man who has introduced himself into our midst, and has learned the secrets of the order. Though I do not personally believe him to be a spy, though I am confident he was brought here by accident, yet he is not of us, and he is a friend of the haughty and wealth-pampered aristocrat whose name forms the password of the evening. He was on his way to her residence when he was brought here."

During this time Hardy remained standing, with his opera hat beneath his elbow and his ulster thrown over his arm. His eyes were fixed on the little ball in Hulin's handkerchief, which, shining in the gas-light, held his gaze with a strange fascination, like the baleful eye of a snake.

"What is his nationality?" asked one of the brethren.

"He says that he is an American," replied Bielinski.

"The Americans," said the questioner, "are a powerful nation. If we should detain this man, who

himself evidently an aristocrat, and has friends, they would raise Heaven and earth to find him, and there would be much publicity and discussion,—a thing that we wish to avoid now. The same thing could result if he should permanently disappear.”

Here he sat down, and silence reigned for a full minute.

“There is much truth,” at length said Bielinski, in what Brother Smirnoff says. Has any other brother any suggestion to make?”

A young Russian arose, a florid-faced, clean-shaven youth, with blue eyes and a sweet expression. His voice was soft and he smiled as he talked.

“He must not disappear,” said the speaker, “as Brother Smirnoff says, neither can we keep him. He would be an elephant on our hands. Neither could it be safe to turn him loose with our secret in his brain and on his tongue. It seems to me, with all due reverence to my elders,”—and here he smiled and waved his hand,—“that there is but one way. He must die and his body must be found under such circumstances that the police will be led to believe he has met his fate through accident. This will come under the head, not of an execution, but of a necessary removal for the good of the Order.”

This was a suave, fluent speaker, a man of easy

and natural gestures. His manner was confident and pleasing and he appeared to be one of those who talk as much for practice and for the sake of hearing their own voices as for any other reason. Hardy sat down in a convenient chair and listened, his gaze shifting from the face of the speaker to the shining ball in the handkerchief of Monsieur Hulin, the mesmeric spot on the table, the pill for tyrants and spies. He could not, somehow, quite realize his danger. He felt more like a man in a dream. A short while ago he was a free man, out in the streets, on his way to the Princess Romanovna, who even now was waiting for him and wondering why he did not appear. Now, here he was, if indeed he were not dreaming, in a nihilists' den, an unwilling eavesdropper at a plot to blow the czar into kingdom-come.

"What method would you propose, Brother Kourbski?" inquired Bielinski.

"There are several methods that naturally suggest themselves," replied Kourbski expansively. Hardy's eyes left the mesmeric spot and sought the speaker's face.

"For instance, he might be chloroformed and thrown into the Moskva, thus giving the impression that he had fallen in and drowned; or, a fine needle

it be driven into the base of his brain, after which he could be dropped into the river; or, he might be taken out to some lonely spot, gagged, of course, to prevent an outcry, stabbed or beaten to death, and robbed. The gags could then be removed and this would cause the impression that he had been killed by footpads for his money and valuables. Fortunately, his attire, that of a wealthy democrat, would corroborate the impression. These are merely suggestions, of course. Would it not be better to decide officially on his fate, and then appoint a committee to settle the manner of his removal?"

Mr. Kourbski sat down and glanced about with a satisfied air.

"It is time," said Bielinski, rising and resting both hands on the table, "to bring this incidental discussion to a close, and proceed with the more important business of the evening. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the great work which we have in hand: the destruction of so-called government and the establishment of universal freedom; the elimination of war, oppression and tyranny, and the inauguration of general and everlasting peace, liberty and brotherhood."

As Bielinski spoke, his face flushed with enthus-

iasm, and his eyes glowed with the light of the dreamer and the Utopian. Murmurs of approval ran through the audience.

"You know," he continued, "how we propose to accomplish this great end. Government is merely a combination of the strong and the favored of the earth to oppress the weak. Laws are simply canons for the regulation of oppression. All these things are unnatural and artificial and are built on a sub-structure of superstition. We propose to render government impossible by making the governing profession so dangerous that no man will dare undertake it. But the question now before us is this: here is a man in our midst who is not of us. He is a sympathizer with and a friend of our oppressors. He came to us, supposing that he was going to the house of the Princess Romanovna, and overheard our plans. He has discovered our place of meeting. Will it be safe to turn him loose, after exacting a promise from him that he will not betray us, if such a promise can be obtained, or is it your mind that he be removed, as Brother Kourbski suggests, for the good of the Order? In voting on this question you will bear in mind that the life of any one individual is of small moment when weighed in the balance against the general good of humanity. Brother

Smirnoff will pass among you, handing each one of you a white and a black marble, a supply of which I have here, and Brother Kourbski will collect your ballots in a hat. A black ballot will signify removal, a white ballot life and some other expedient. Brother Smirnoff!"

That member arose and stepped briskly to the side of the chairman who took a number of marbles from a drawer and poured them into a hat. Kourbski followed him about with another hat, into which the members dropped their votes. In the ghastly silence that reigned, Hardy could hear his heart beat plainly, and the marbles dropping, dropping, into the hat, rattled like paving-stones falling from a height. As Kourbski stepped to the table and poured the marbles on it, the American arose, and mechanically twitching at his pince-nez, gazed with open mouth. A black stream poured from the hat.

"The ballots are all black!" announced the chairman. "I shall appoint Brothers Kourbski, Stankietch and Golovlev as a committee of three on ways and means. Gentlemen, you will retire into the adjoining room. Kindly reach your decision as soon as possible, for this, as I have said, is only an incidental matter, and we have much of importance before us."

The three members retired, closing the door softly behind them. The dream was becoming reality. Hardy, who was still standing, glanced about like a trapped animal, his eyes hunting some desperate means of escape. There was the window. He might dash at that and leap at the panes. The crash and the outcry which he would make might attract the attention of some passer-by. But, alas, the majority of the company were sitting between him and the window, and the shutters, which he could discern through the thick curtains, were, no doubt, heavy and well secured. His overcoat dropped to the floor and a scarcely audible "bump" attracted his attention. He picked up the garment, and slid his hand into the pocket, where it touched the cold handle of a revolver. He remembered that a merchant had given him the weapon in the morning as a sample of a large stock of German imitations that could be sold at a much lower price than the American original. The merchant had said that it was a good weapon, despite the cheapness, and had requested him to try it.

But it was not loaded.

At this moment the committee reëntered the room. It had transacted its grisly business with despatch. Kourbski acted as spokesman.

"Mr. Chairman and Brethren," he announced, "we have decided that the most practical method is to bind the prisoner and drive an awl into the base of his brain. We have with us here a shoemaker, who can do the business scientifically. Then, in the early hours of the morning, when the street is deserted, we can throw him into Brother Ivan's cab, drive him to some lonely spot on the banks of the Moskva and drop him into the water."

"The committee already appointed will act in this matter," said Bielinski in a businesslike tone, "with the addition of Brother Ivan, who is a strong man, and the shoemaker."

Ivan and the shoemaker arose and the five men turned toward Hardy, who, during the absence of the committee, had been staring at the mesmeric spot of light on the table.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, backing to the wall and speaking with an inspiration born of despair and the immediate presence of a horrible death, "hear me for one word!"

The suddenness of his appeal caused his appointed executioners to halt, while every face in the audience turned toward him in wonderment. "No man is ever executed without being allowed a last word, a farewell. Even the law, which you say is an inven-

tion of tyrants, permits that! Surely, as you say that you are killing me in the interest of humanity, you can not be unjust and savage. All I ask is one word before I die, a parting message, perhaps, to be given to my friends."

"Speak, then," commanded Bielinski, "but be brief, as we have weighty matters to discuss. Do not waste your breath in pleading for mercy."

"I was going to visit the Princess Romanovna," said Hardy, pale as death, but speaking distinctly, "not because I am an aristocrat, for I come from America, the most democratic country on earth. I was invited to visit her because I saved her life on the Amur through my skill with the pistol. My skill, which has made me famous in my native land, enabled me to kill two Chinese who were attempting to abduct her. It is second nature to me. I shoot with absolute precision. Had I my weapon here I could pick off in succession, from where I stand, the buttons on Mr. Bielinski's coat."

"What is that to us?" asked the chairman. "You are talking to gain time. Give us your parting message, and we will try to get it to those for whom it is intended."

"I could hit," proceeded Hardy, "that explosive ball yonder, the invention of Monsieur Hulin, and

blow you all to atoms, and by God! if any one here stirs or attempts to lay hands on me, I'll do it!"

With these words, he suddenly whipped the pistol from his pocket, and, leaning forward, aimed at the ball.

CHAPTER XXXV

“IN THE NAME OF THE CZAR!”

The nihilists were thrown into panic by this sudden move on the part of Hardy. For the moment he was in control of the situation, though he was well aware that he could not remain so for long.

His arm would tire, or a quick move on the part of one of the members would obscure the ball from his sight.

He must decide on the next step instantly.

In the meantime every face in that room was turned toward him, pale, eager, agape. On many fear had set its stamp unmistakably, and Hardy fancied that the hair on several heads had actually arisen in fright. One man sprang to the window, against the frame of which he set his palms, and was looking back at the American over his shoulder. The others were cowering in their seats.

All doubt as to the genuineness of the “pill” was dissipated by a glance at the countenance of that

great inventor, Monsieur Hulin, dark in its normal state, now a yellowish green. His teeth were chattering and he was licking his thin lips in a fever of fear. It was evident that these people had no relish for their own medicine.

"Do not shoot," faltered Bielinski; "perhaps some other arrangement can be made in your case! Perhaps something else can be thought of! I have no doubt something else can be thought of!"

"If a single member moves," said Hardy in a clear, ringing voice, "I shall certainly shoot. And now, hear my terms. I must be allowed to go. I shall back out of this door behind me. If any one opens it while I am crossing the adjoining room, I shall shoot to kill, and the noise will probably bring the police down on you. I promise you that I shall not notify the police of your plot nor point out your place of meeting till twelve hours after my escape. Now repeat after me: We call the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, the Virgin Mary and all the saints to witness— Repeat, I say, every man of you, in concert—I give you till I count three to begin!" He extended his arm, the elbow of which had been resting against his side, and sighted along the pistol. "One, two—" A murmur arose, as of a congregation, repeating a response:

"We call the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, the Virgin and all the saints to witness,—"

"Very good! But speak louder. —that we will permit the American to pass freely from this house."

"—that we will permit the American to pass freely from this house—" came the response, louder this time.

"—and we call down on our heads the vengeance of God and all the saints, if he is interfered with and his departure prevented!"

This also was repeated in chorus by the nihilists.

"If we break this oath, may we all come to violent ends and our souls burn in hell for ever! Amen!" said Hardy.

"If we break this oath, may we all come to violent ends and our souls burn in hell for ever! Amen!" said the nihilists.

The American backed to the door, still aiming at the ball, passed through it after some little nervous fumbling for the knob, closed it behind him and started to run rapidly across the empty room in which he now found himself, not without, however, making an effort to lock the door, which was impossible, as there was no key on the outside, and no bolt.

A savage uproar broke loose in the room which he had just quitted—the sound of men struggling,



“ I give you till I count three to begin ! One, two—”
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curses, shouts,—and ere he had traversed half the distance of the hall, the door behind him flew open, and half a dozen nihilists were vomited forth. Several of them were armed, and, pointing pistols at Hardy, they shrieked:

"Drop that revolver, or we shoot! You can not escape!"

"But your oath!" he cried, facing them.

"Oath, hell! Do you think an oath binds us? Can any one live in Russia and believe in God?"

At this moment the hall door was thrown open and a man rushed to Hardy's side. It was Mordecai, the Jew, with his red eyes, his bushy red whiskers his big hook-nose.

"Mr. Hardy!" he cried, "my dear pupil!" and he sprang between the American and the pistols that were pointed at the latter's body. "Stop, Brothers, stop!" he shrieked. "What madness is this? What is this man accused of? I know him. He is a friend, I will vouch for him on my life. I will defend him. If you kill him you must kill me, too."

"He is a friend of aristocrats," explained Bielin-ski, stepping forward, "he entered here by mistake, he says, but it is possible that he is a spy. At any rate, he knows our secret; he has overheard our plans and he will betray us. He must die."

“And I say that he shall not die,” cried Mordecai. “It was he who braved the Russian mob at Stryensk and saved my life. He is no spy nor aristocrat, he is a simple merchant, an American. Though he does not belong to the Order, he is in spirit a brother, and he is a friend of the downtrodden and the oppressed, for whom he is willing to risk his life.”

“He is also willing to risk his life for aristocrats,” hissed one of the nihilists. “It was he who saved the Princess Romanovna on the Amur.”

“I admit it,” replied the Jew, “and I would that he had not done it—curse her and all her foul kin! But in saving her life, he was fighting also for his own. Shall a man die if he can live? But I tell you he risked his own life to save mine, and I am a despised and persecuted Jew. My mother was murdered through the connivance of the Russian authorities. Who doubts my fidelity to the cause? Who has more reason than I to hate the government—all governments?”

“Baruch is a Jew,” cried one of the nihilists, “he would betray us for thirty pieces of silver,—let us kill them both!”

And at this that old murmur arose, that burden of hate which in Russia is stronger than hate of the

government or of the aristocrats or of oppression, that shibboleth that makes all Russians brothers, high and low.

"Moschke! Moschke! The Jew! The Jew!"

"My brave friend," said Hardy turning to Mordecai, "they are going to shoot now. Save yourself!"—and grabbing the heroic Jew by the shoulder, he jerked him suddenly from his feet and sent him sprawling to the floor.

The game was played out. The mad fanatics before Hardy, wild-eyed, some with pistols in their hands, some with knives, others with their fingers bent like the talons of birds of prey, were intent on his death. Had his own weapon been loaded, he might still have checked them long enough to escape through the door by a shot or two. But they had forgotten his weapon in their passion and there was no way to remind them of its existence now. Nothing save the ringing report of a shot would penetrate that delirium of malice. The hatred bred of ages of wrong was overflowing from those emittered hearts, and, like the angry waters bursting from a broken dam, it would not stop to choose its victim.

Hardy closed his eyes and commended his soul to God.

And at this moment a loud hammering was heard on the outer or street door.

"Silence!" gasped Bielinski in a whisper,—a whisper, nevertheless, that could be heard more distinctly in the sudden silence than a shout. "What is that?"

As if in answer to his question, the door opening into the hall flew wide, and the old woman looked in, disheveled and pale, moaning as she crossed herself rapidly:

"The police! The police!"

Again that thundering on the door sounded through the house, and a stern voice could be heard, commanding:

"Open, in the name of the czar!"

Hardy was forgotten. The czar, their arch-enemy, was at the gates of their fortress and his name was a word of terror. The nihilists flew past the American on tiptoe, into the hall, several of them jostling and almost knocking him over in their eagerness to escape.

"Come with me!" whispered Baruch, who had regained his feet. "You must not be found here!"—and seizing Hardy by the arm, he also jumped for the open door. Hardy made no resistance, and was soon running down the long hall with the others, led

by the Jew. They came to a narrow flight of stairs, leading to the cellar, and down this they crowded, scrambling and fighting, some of them losing their footing and rolling to the bottom. A loud crash arrested Hardy's attention. He was standing in the darkness, but at the farther end of the hall was a hanging lamp, turned low, and by the light of this he could see the door fly in splinters and the officers of the law pour in.

"Throw your bomb, brother, throw your bomb!" said Bielinski; and Hulin, leaping like a cat into the middle of the passage, hurled the sphere down the hall with an oath. There was a muffled report, not loud, and much jingling of glass. The light went out, but, by the momentary flash of the explosive, Hardy could see several policemen pitch forward on their faces.

"Come, come away!" said Mordecai, and Hardy scurried down the dark cellar steps with the Jew.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HARDY BUYS AN OVERCOAT

They were in utter darkness now. Above could be heard a hoarse uproar, faint and confused, shouts and sounds of heavy boots on the flooring; here in the cellar, the shuffling feet of the escaping nihilists, the bump or rattle of an occasional obstruction kicked or run against, muttered oaths. Mordecai, still holding Hardy by the arm, pulled him rapidly across the cellar until they stumbled against the feet of men crawling on their hands and knees. The American pitched forward on the back of one of these, who kicked at him savagely and swore a foul oath under his breath.

“Get down,” whispered Mordecai, “and crawl, crawl with me!”

They passed through an opening in the wall, so low that it brought the American flat on his stomach, and still scratched his back. That it was barely wide enough for two at a time was evident from the

fact that, though he had crowded close to Mordecai, the wall scraped his right side. They were through in a trice and still in utter darkness. The sound of scuffling feet again could be heard,—the sound of the nihilists fleeing.

“The fools!” muttered Mordecai, “they forgot to put back the stone.”

It was evident from his grunts and a scratching sound that he was struggling with some heavy object.

“There,” he muttered at last, “it is flush now, and just in time! Listen, my dear pupil, do you not hear them? They are in the cellar. Put your ear against the wall.”

Hardy did as was requested, and he could indeed hear faint sounds on the other side of the wall.

“Where are we now?” he asked.

“We are in the cellar of the adjoining house, belonging to a member of the Order. The brothers have escaped by an underground passage—by an old forgotten sewer. But it will not be safe for you to follow them. They will have recovered their wits by this time and some of them will lie in wait for you and kill you, feeling sure that you will tell what you have seen and heard.”

Hardy’s eyes were becoming accustomed to the

darkness, and in the distance he could see a slit of dim, gray light. He felt his way to it, striking a barrel and hitting his head against a hanging shelf on the way. By the sense of touch he assured himself that he had arrived at the cellar window, boarded up, and that the slit of gray light came through an imperfect joining. The door must be somewhere near. With his fingers against the wall, he took several steps to the left without finding it; then he returned to the right, made the same experiment, and his efforts were rewarded with success.

Mordecai was at his side.

“What are you going to do?” asked the Jew.

“I am going to walk boldly out of this door,” replied Hardy. “The explosion will have drawn the whole neighborhood to the front of the house, on the other street, and I shall not be noticed. If I am, I can explain how I came here, and how I escaped. I am going to chance it, and the quicker I go the better,”—and he pushed back the heavy bolt which he had found by this time. “Good-by, my friend, and thank you. I suppose you will rejoin your brethren. You have saved my life and I shall never forget it. For your sake, I will say nothing about what I have seen and heard this night. The nest is broken up for the present and the police do not seem to need my aid.”

“Go, then,” said Mordecai, “and farewell, and luck go with you! I shall attempt to escape alone. I shall not rejoin those ingrates. I became one of them to avenge the death of my mother, but there is no place for the Jew in Russia, either among the friends or the enemies of the government. I shall go back to America.”

“Good-by,” said Hardy once more, “my dear friend and teacher,”—and he took the thin, clammy hand in his, pressing it warmly.

“Good-by!” sobbed Mordecai, “my dear pupil!”

Hardy opened the door and stepped out. He closed it quietly behind him and ran up the cellar steps into the starlight. He was in a back yard surrounded by a high fence, over which a street lamp, peeping, cast its yellow gleam over a midnight world of snow. He walked briskly down a broad path, passed out of a gate into an alley and hurried away. As he had anticipated, no one noticed him. The half-dozen police, who had been stationed at the rear of the adjoining house, had run around to the front to the aid of their brothers, on hearing the explosion.

The American walked a couple of squares, then turned sharply to the right and gained the main street. He was safe now, and he hailed a passing

cab, and ordered the *izvoschik* to take him to the Slaviansky Bazar. As he stood on the walk, waiting for the vehicle to draw up, he felt chilly and, his excitement having subsided somewhat, he made a discovery that gave him a shock and filled him with a feeling of uneasiness that was destined to possess him for many days to come.

He had left his overcoat behind somewhere in that den of nihilists. He got into the cab, and, as it tore through the streets, the wheels squeaking in the snow, he sat there shivering, his chin in his hand, racking his brain to remember, if possible, whether there was anything in the pockets, a letter, cards, a cigar-case, that might betray the identity of the owner. To save his life he could not settle this point in his mind.

It was late when he reached the hotel. To his surprise, he found Wang sitting up, reading. The boy sprang to his feet, trembling with delight.

"Ah, my dear master!" he cried, "so here you are at last!"

"But why did you not go to bed, Wang?" asked Hardy not unkindly. "You look pale and tired. You have been working too hard, lately, and you need sleep."

"I fell asleep," replied Wang, "and I had a horri-

ble dream about you. I thought you were in a cave filled with poisonous snakes, all about your feet, and hanging writhing from the ceiling, close to your head. It seemed to me that you did not dare to stir, nor even to breathe, for fear they would strike you, and I, who was looking at the entrance, could not help you, could not cry out, nor even move a finger, for the same reason. For a moment all the snakes seemed unaware of your presence, then one, at the far end of the cave, fixed his twinkling, malignant eyes on you, and began to glide through the noisome, poisonous mass toward your face. Closer and closer he came, and just as he drew back his head to strike, I awoke. Ugh! 'Twas a frightful dream."

"Yes," laughed Hardy nervously, "it certainly was a nasty nightmare, but pure imagination, I assure you, for I have been in no cave filled with snakes. Now go to bed, I command you. Good night!" Hardy passed into the adjoining room, and went to bed, but he got little sleep that night. He was listening for the tramp of heavy feet up the stairs, the thumping of a sword-hilt upon his bedroom door, and that gruff command again, which he had already heard once:

"Open, in the name of the czar!"

But the hours passed and he was undisturbed,

and just as the gray light of dawn began to sift in through the curtains, he fell into a sound slumber. It was fully ten o'clock when he went out into his office and sent for his coffee. As he was drinking it, Wang entered in great excitement, with a newspaper.

"Look at this!" cried the boy. "The police raided a den of nihilists last night, and the latter threw a bomb, killing four of the officers and wounding six others. It was the society known as 'The Enemies of Russia,' made up of disaffected Russians, Poles, Finns, even Jews,—all who hate this accursed government."

Hardy glanced at the boy, marveling much at the revelation of hate in that ingenuous word, "accursed."

"Why are you an enemy of Russia?" he asked.

"Oh, for no particular reason," faltered the boy, turning pale. "I,—perhaps I am not. And the nihilists all disappeared, as though the earth had swallowed them up. Not a thing was left to prove the identity of a member, except one costly, fur-lined overcoat, which proves that this society numbers among its members some of the wealthier classes, perhaps of the nobility. I tell you,"—and Wang struck the paper with his right hand in his excite-

ment,—“that this country is a house divided against itself. Leave it alone, and it will work out its own destruction, and salvation!”

The boy's eyes were flashing now and his cheeks were so aflame with excitement that the scar nearly disappeared.

Hardy gulped down his coffee and started for the door.

“If anybody calls for me, Wang,” he said, “tell them that I will be back in an hour.”

He did return in that time, wearing an exact duplicate of the overcoat that he had lost the night before. And still there was no sign of the police. He felt reassured. Had there been any telltale letters, cards or documents in the pockets of the missing garment, the officers of the law, he reasoned, would have lost no time in laying hands on him. If, on the other hand, no such proof existed, he reasoned, he would be tolerably safe. The police may have observed that he had been wearing a certain overcoat. Well, here he was, as far as appearances went, still possessing the same garment. For he had gone directly to Seltzer and Gallanter and had made a clean breast to the head of the firm, whose interest it was to protect him, as The American Trading Company was Seltzer and Gallanter's best

customer. That they did their utmost in the premises, will appear by the sequel, for the police lost no time in visiting every clothing store in Moscow and in instituting inquiries in all the principal cities of the empire.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HARDY MAKES A CALL

The Princess Romanovna was attired in a gown of pale blue silk, décolleté, trimmed with dainty cream lace. Her neck was encircled by a string of pearls, of priceless purity, evenness of size and perfection of form. There was something in the creamy softness and whiteness of her skin, faintly, almost imperceptibly glowing with the warm, red hue of health and youth, that suggested the delicate tinting of the interior of a sea-shell, or foam shot through with the first rays of the morning sun, and the pearls seemed at home with such a background.

Her shoulders were so exquisitely modeled that revealment became a duty and a matter of course. Immodesty is the child of ugliness. Her arms were round and firm and beautiful; when she bent them, there was no angle at the elbow, or unsightly projection, but a perfect, graceful curve, and when she straightened them out, the skin did not wrinkle there and corrugate, but dimpled ravishingly.

As he arose from the chair in which he sat awaiting her entrance, Hardy, accustomed to fashionable and high-bred women, noticed, as she advanced toward him with welcoming hand extended, that her soft, light hair was parted in the middle and combed low over her broad forehead, and that the thick, glossy knot, confined in an invisible net, was set low down at the nape of her neck.

She held her head high and haughtily as the head of a queen, yet her red, full lips parted in a dazzling smile, and perfect friendliness shone from her blue eyes.

"I received your note at ten o'clock this morning," she said in French, in the most natural way in the world, as though she had seen him only yesterday, "and fortunately, I had no unavoidable engagement until eleven."

They stood in the center of a luxurious salon, flooded with a soft, rose-colored light from electric bulbs ingeniously disposed about the ceiling.

"I was very sorry," he replied, "to disappoint myself last evening, and also to put you to any possible annoyance in waiting for me. But, the fact is—"

"But," she exclaimed, in her own tongue, "you are positively speaking Russian! And so perfectly, too! I can hardly believe my ears. It is incredible!

But don't let's remain standing here like two posts. Sit down, over here, and we will have a nice cozy talk. I can give you two full hours."

She crossed the room to a low divan, and seated herself comfortably on one end of it, among a mass of luxurious pillows.

Hardy took his place beside her and said easily:

"The hope of conversing with you some time, in your own tongue, Princess, has been a great incentive to me in my studies of Russian. Without that incentive, I should scarcely have made such progress as you are kind enough to credit me with."

He was at home now, more at home than in the store at Stryetensk, or in the wholesale houses of the Moscow merchants, and these words of delicate flattery came naturally to his lips. The Princess flashed one quick, searching look at him. The man was a gentleman, in the conventional sense, as well as a hero, and no more afraid of a princess than of a Chinese brigand.

"So you learned Russian that you might talk with me?" she laughed with a slight tinge of coquetry. "How perfectly charming! But," she pouted, "I fear that your desperate struggle with the terrible Russian tongue is but a poor compliment to my French. Did you then find that so unintelligible?"

“Not at all,” he replied, “except as far as my own poor mastery of it rendered it so. But my desire to converse with you in Russian was quite natural. I used often to wish that I could understand you when you were talking on the Amur steamer. Besides, Russian, as spoken by you, seemed a very beautiful language, and one well worth acquiring.”

She did not see fit to pursue this topic further.

“You shall always speak Russian with me, then. By the way, have you heard anything further from your heroic friend, Smulders? I hope you have not lost all trace of him. I should so like to know how his love-affair with the fair but tantalizing ‘Chulia’ came out.”

“Of that I am able to inform you, as I have recently heard from Smulders. He and ‘Chulia’ are married and living in Amsterdam. Smulders is in the seventh heaven of happiness.”

The Princess clapped her little hands with joy.

“Isn’t it delightful,” she exclaimed, “to hear of a love-affair that ends happily? And I have no doubt that ‘Chulia’ will settle down into a sensible, affectionate wife, and repay him for all his sufferings. Was that not a terrible happening last night, the killing and wounding of those poor officers? The nihilists are becoming bolder and bolder every

day. Only the severest measures will stamp out this evil of nihilism. There is no other way to deal with these misguided men, who, if they could only be made to see it, are their own worst enemies. Could they know how it grieves the Little Father to be severe with any of his children, they would not resort to violence."

"Do you know the czar?" asked Hardy.

"Oh, quite well! I assure you that he has the heart of a woman and that he loves all his people as a mother loves her children. His constant care and study is how he may better their condition, and many are the sleepless nights which he passes, till his physicians are positively alarmed lest he wreck his health, worrying over the sorrows of the poor and the downtrodden, and devising ways for the amelioration of their condition. You little realize the difficulties he has to contend with."

"I suppose not. And yet we in America have a pretty good idea of the nobility of his character and the goodness of his heart. There is no reigning monarch of the world more highly respected in democratic America to-day than the czar of autocratic Russia."

"Oh, I am glad to hear you say that!" exclaimed the Princess, her beautiful eyes dimming with a mist

of tears. "I shall tell him of this when next I see him, and I assure you that these words, coming from an American, will afford him great satisfaction. But you must not call us 'autocratic Russia,' for there are no more democratic people in the world than our Russians. I assure you that no one is interfered with who obeys the laws. But when men plot to murder and kill, what can you do with them? What did you do with your own anarchists not so many years ago in Chicago? Let me see, how many did you hang from one scaffold? Twenty-five, was it not?"

"Oh, dear no! We are not so—ah—wholesale as all that in America. Only five were condemned and four executed. One committed suicide."

"Well, the affair made a great impression in Russia, and confirmed the authorities in the theory that drastic measures would, in time, be effectual. By those executions anarchy was stamped out in America, as we kill a snake by stamping on its head. I wish it could as easily be destroyed here. I am sorry for the families of the killed and wounded officers! I have started a subscription for them, which has already been generously responded to."

"May I put my name down for a small amount?" asked Hardy.

"It would be so generous of you! But it does not seem right to allow you to contribute to the relief of people who are not even your own countrymen."

"I should be very glad to subscribe to this," replied Hardy, "for I can understand the destitute condition in which these women and children must be left, and the case strongly appeals to my sympathies. But even if I didn't know all about it, I should be quite sure that I was right in contributing to any charity that had your approval."

The Princess laughed as she arose.

"You forget that we are talking Russian," she said.

"Why?"

"It is only in the French tongue," she replied, "that one pays these delicate compliments. But excuse me at this moment, till I get my list of contributions."

She left the room and returned almost immediately with a paper, which she put into Hardy's hands.

"It's good of you," he said, "to let me in on this. It will give me great pleasure to put my name down to such a cause, especially when it is headed by so fair a promoter."

"Mais vraiment, vous m'obligerez à parler français!" exclaimed the Princess with a graceful inclination of her head.

Hardy noticed that the list was headed "Elizabetha Romanovna, one thousand roubles," and that several others had contributed equal sums. The last name thus far obtained, and next to which Hardy must sign, was that of Boris Romanoff, who was down for two thousand roubles.

The American was puzzled for a moment. He knew why this handsome daredevil Russian had subscribed so large an amount. That Boris Romanoff was touched by the suffering of the poor was a thought to bring a smile to the face of any who chanced to know him.

Hardy was not rich, as we know. He had saved a few thousands from his fortune, and his salary and profits from commissions brought him a respectable income. He held his pen for a moment suspended, as he remarked, looking the Princess quizzically in the eye:

"Your cousin is very tender-hearted, is he not—quite charitably disposed?"

"He has responded handsomely, has he not?" she replied carelessly, but there was an amused look in her eye. "But he is rich and doesn't mind a little sum

like this. Besides, he knows that I am anxious to make these poor people comfortable."

Hardy scribbled his name on the paper and handed it back carelessly to the Princess.

"But, Monsieur!" she gasped, "my friend, I could not accept so much from you! You have made some mistake here!"

He adjusted his gold pince-nez, looked critically at the paper, and read *sotto voce*:

"'Frederick Courtland Hardy, roubles two thousand five hundred.' No, that is quite correct, your Highness. I shall take great pleasure in sending you a check in the morning. You have little idea of how this cause appeals to me."

The Princess flushed and held the paper in her hand for some moments in silence, looking at it.

"The Americans are as generous as they are brave," she said at last, in a low voice. "I shall accept this noble gift on behalf of my poor people, in whose name I thank you."

At this moment a servant appeared at the door and announced:

"Lieutenant Gortchakov!"

"I regret that I must be leaving you now," said the Romanova; "but stay! I should like to introduce you to the lieutenant. He is a great admirer of

America and Americans. Show the lieutenant in, Aleko."

The lieutenant entered, tall, in his twenties, very slender and handsome. He was attired in the uniform of the Imperial Guards. Seeing the Princess, he bowed very low, clicking his heels together. Then he walked rapidly to her, and, bending with exquisite grace and assurance, lifted her hand to his lips. After which he turned politely and inquiringly toward Hardy, who arose.

"Lieutenant Gortchakov," said the Princess, "this is Mr. Hardy, the brave American, of whom you have heard me speak. I desire you to be friends."

"It gives me great pleasure to make your acquaintance," said the lieutenant, extending his hand.

"The pleasure is mine, I assure you," replied Hardy.

"General Catkoff has already told me of your heroic deeds on the Amur," said the lieutenant. "I have been hoping for some time that I might have the honor of meeting you. I had no idea that you were in Moscow."

Gortchakov was a frank, ingenuous youth, to whom the American took an immediate liking.

"I shall leave you two together," said the Princess, rising, "while I go and get my wraps. Oh, by

the way, Alexieff, why can we not drive Mr. Hardy by the Slaviansky Bazar? The lieutenant has a new pair of white Arabian horses, which he is anxious for me to see. I am sure that Mr. Hardy can appreciate fine horses."

"I shall be most happy," replied the lieutenant, "if Mr. Hardy will accept."

"Oh, I am sure he will," laughed the Princess, "if he is sufficiently urged."

She left the room, and Gortchakov began to explain that he was driving her to a reception, and that the Slaviansky would be on the way. He had not been talking over a minute, when Boris Romanoff entered, superbly handsome in evening dress. An older man accompanied him. Romanoff shook hands cordially with Gortchakov, whom he addressed as "Alexieff," and to whom he introduced his companion, General Koukolnik.

He did not introduce Koukolnik to Hardy, but said to the latter with an evil, insolent smile:

"Hello, Hardy, how's trade? But these Americans are enterprising!" he explained affably to the general. "This fellow here is a storekeeper, who, it seems, is working the Russian nobility for all he is worth. What's your scheme now? Tell us, that's a good fellow! You shall have our influence with

the Princess—she ought to be an easy mark, under the circumstances—eh, General?”

The American paled with rage, but he looked Romanoff full in the eyes, returning insolence for insolence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE PRINCESS COMMANDS

“Being only a merchant,” replied the American, “I find it necessary to cultivate good manners to a certain extent. Were I a prince, I might also be a boor.”

“Upon my soul!” exclaimed General Koukolnik, “but this is a very peppery merchant!” The general’s cheeks and nose were adorned with a network of varicose veins, the result of innumerable deep potations of vodka. He was that anomalous combination, an excitable fat man, and he had a habit of jerking so fiercely at his long, pointed side-whiskers that he pulled down the puffy underlid of his eye, disclosing the red conjunctiva.

Romanoff flushed with rage.

“Fellow,” said he, “I am not going to waste any words with you. I grant you a certain degree of courage, considerable shrewdness and any amount of insolence. But you are making a sad mistake

if you hope to force your way into high society simply because you happened to kill a Chinaman or two on the Amur. You may take advantage of my cousin's good nature, but you can not impose on the rest of us. The best thing for you to do is to accept a good, substantial check for your services to the family, and take yourself off. How much shall it be?"—and he pulled a check-book from his pocket. "Better take my advice and accept it now, while we are in the mood, and the offer is open."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Koukolnik.

"I suppose that I shall be offended at this later," drawled Hardy, "when I get to thinking over it. At present you are too interesting as a study in—ah—zoölogy. I do not believe there is such another boor and ruffian living in all Moscow as you. Certainly, the Russians of the better class that I have met thus far have all been gentlemen."

"I trust this doesn't bore you, Alexieff, nor you, General," said Romanoff, "but I really must settle with this fellow once and for all, and have it over with. I met him first in Japan, where he played me a low trick, for which he, no doubt, received money from the Japanese authorities. He became infatuated with a woman of disreputable character there, and he and the woman had me put on a boat, os-

tensibly sailing for Vladivostok. I soon found out that I was to be imprisoned or put to death. This fellow remained in Japan with his paramour, and he came on here afterward at his leisure. I have had him watched since by the police, and it is certain that he is an enemy of the government, and perhaps a Japanese spy. It is known that he consorts with Jews, and I strongly suspect that he is himself an American Jew. The Romanoff family is, unfortunately, under certain obligations to him, for which I am offering to pay him liberally. Come, now, my man, how much shall it be?"

"There must surely be some mistake here," said Gortchakov. "I was introduced to Mr. Hardy by the Princess, who recommended him to me as a possible friend. What have you to say to these accusations of the Prince, Mr. Hardy?"

"Nothing," replied the American, "save that if we were not under the roof of a lady, I should tell Romanoff that I can not believe that he is mistaken—"

"You would have us think then—?" suggested Gortchakov.

"—that he is undoubtedly lying!"

"Have a care!" cried Romanoff, raising his voice. "Do not presume too far on the protection of the

Princess! Once more and for the last time, I ask you, how much do you want?"—and he thrust the check-book under Hardy's nose.

"You are positively growing tiresome," said Hardy, and he flipped the book from Romanoff's fingers, so that it flew fluttering half-way across the room.

"Hell and furies!" exclaimed Romanoff. "Take that, you son of a dirty Jewess!"—and he struck Hardy violently in the face with the flat of his hand. The blow staggered the American and left a number of red welts, that contrasted strangely with the marble whiteness of his cheeks.

"This insult must be answered for elsewhere," he said in low, even tones. "Lieutenant Gortchakov, I am a comparative stranger here; will you do me the honor of seconding me in this affair?"

"You want me to fight a duel with you?" laughed Romanoff. "With you, a Jew storekeeper? Leave this house instantly, or I shall have you kicked into the street."

"I am an American," Hardy explained to Gortchakov, "and the gentlemen of America earn their living by honest toil. Moreover, I am by birth and education a gentleman. Will you be my second?"

Gortchakov caught sight of a stately white figure

standing in a distant door,—the figure of a tall woman wearing a long white opera cloak, a coronet blazing with diamonds surmounting her regal brow.

He extended his hand to Hardy.

“I will be your second,” he said.

“Are you mad?” said Romanoff. “I can not fight with this low fellow, this tradesman.”

“I know Mr. Hardy through the introduction of the Princess Romanovna,” declared Alexieff; “that is quite sufficient for me.”

“You will either fight me or I will horsewhip you on the public streets,” insisted Hardy, not raising his voice. “I knew you to be a liar,—I did not suspect that you were also a coward.”

“Gentlemen, for shame!” cried the Princess, advancing to the angry group, her eyes blazing with indignation. “Do you forget that you are in my house?”

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed Koukolnik, “it is the Princess! Madame, I humbly salute you,”—and clicking his heels together, he made a low bow.

“Ah, good evening, cousin,” said Romanoff; “I beg your pardon for this disturbance, but really, this fellow here is to blame. I offered to pay him for the service which he has rendered to a member of the family. He knocked my check-book from my

hand, and I very properly chastised his insolence by slapping his face. As the head of the family it is my duty to protect you from low adventurers. I demand now most decidedly that you bid him begone!"

"Oh, Boris!" cried the Princess, more in sorrow than in anger, "out of your own mouth I condemn you. If you offered this gentleman money, I am obliged to decide that he did a very spirited and proper thing in knocking your check-book from your hand. In the name of the Romanoff family, Mr. Hardy, I ask your pardon for this insult that has been heaped on you under my roof!"

"I will pardon him," replied Hardy, "after he has fought me, according to the custom among gentlemen in this country. He has struck me and he must give me satisfaction."

"What!" cried the Princess, "a duel? It is against the law. I shall not permit it."

"This Jew, this shopkeeper, wants me to fight him," sneered Romanoff.

"Your Highness has been pleased to express gratitude for certain services which I have been fortunate enough to render you—to express a hope that you might be able, in fact, to do something for me in return. I now demand a gentleman's satisfaction

for this blow. It is all that I shall ever ask from the Romanoff family."

"I shall also pay you for the blow," snarled Romanoff.

The Princess glanced indignantly at Romanoff, then turned her eyes searchingly on Hardy, who stood there, white to the lips, rigid as a statue, looking scornfully at her cousin.

"You must fight him, Boris," she said at last, in a voice low, yet perfectly distinct in the tense silence.

Romanoff bowed gracefully, with an evil smile.

"I shall kill him with pleasure, since you desire it," he said.

"My seconds will wait on you in the morning," said Hardy. "Madame, I am your debtor and grateful servant. I have the honor of wishing you good evening,"—and he walked from the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE PRINCESS ENTREATS

In the preliminary arrangements for the duel, Lieutenant Gortchakov represented the American with zeal and fidelity. Romanoff's seconds, fully aware of Hardy's reputation for skill with the pistol, objected to that weapon.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed General Koukolnik, "an exchange of bullets would be nothing less than murder, and none of us, as Russians, could permit that. This American could shoot his adversary through the heart or between the eyes without the least trouble in the world, and his hatred of him is so great that he will certainly do it. We can't permit that—upon my soul, we can't!"

"For the time being," replied Gortchakov with firmness, "I shall forget that I am a Russian, and shall demand justice for the man who has asked me to represent him. My man has little or no knowledge of the rapier. A combat *à l'outrance* with

swords would mean just as surely his destruction. He is, as you well know, the outraged party, and the choice of weapons should be his. Romanoff, moreover, is not unskilful with the pistol, and there is no doubt as to the quality of his nerve."

Fortunately for Gortchakov's contention, the Baron Koubelik, Koukolnik's associate, believed Hardy's reputation for skill greatly exaggerated.

"The fellow is a plebeian, too," he urged, "a mere tradesman, who will lose his nerve when made to stand up and be shot at. Take my word for it, Koukolnik, his arm will tremble like a dog's tail when you pat it on the head. If it were I, I'd rather shoot him down than dirty my sword on him, and I've no doubt in the world that Romanoff will feel the same. If we insist on the rapier, too, when this American is, as you know, the aggrieved party, we shall be casting a slur on our man's courage. No Russian nobleman fears any adversary, with any weapon."

By this time Koukolnik had taken so many potations of vodka that the bravado in this sentiment appealed to him.

"You are right!" he cried, "and pistols it shall be. Prince Romanoff shall shoot this tradesman down,—he shall not soil his rapier on him."

Gortchakov was jubilant over this arrangement and he hastened to Hardy's quarters in the hotel to tell him of the success of his negotiations.

"All you have to do now," said the dapper young Russian, "is to shoot the great bully through the heart, or between the eyes."

Hardy glanced at Gortchakov's flushed face. He was struck by the eagerness of his manner, and his evident delight at Romanoff's mortal peril.

"Don't wait till he shoots first," counseled the lieutenant; "for he has a sort of awkward skill with the pistol himself. Take aim and shoot just as you hear the word 'three.' My associate and I will see that you do not get into serious trouble with the law. We shall testify to the grossness of the insult. The Princess, too, will stand by you. Whatever her feelings for Romanoff, she is too much of a thoroughbred to see an injustice done, and she has great influence with the czar."

There was a slight break in Gortchakov's voice when he mentioned the name of the Princess, an agitation in his manner that suggested a possible explanation of his hatred of Romanoff. Hardy remembered the adage, "All is fair in love and war."

The Princess' beauty was of the sort that breeds murder in the hearts of men.

"If her Highness loves her cousin," Hardy said sadly, "killing him will not make her love him the less, or—or—us the more. She is not the sort of woman who loves twice in a lifetime."

"She does not, she can not know what a worthless brute he is!" cried Gortchakov. "If she loves him, it would be saving her from a fate worse than death to kill him. And think of the insult which he heaped on you! And I assure you that you can kill him with perfect safety."

Hardy laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"A gentleman does not think of the consequences to himself when he is vindicating his honor. I shall settle this score with Romanoff with a full realization of all the aggravating circumstances."

Gortchakov seized the American's hand impulsively.

"Pardon me, my friend," he said, "I intended no imputation on your courage; but there are others besides myself who are tired of this great bully, Romanoff!"

"When is the meeting to take place?" asked Hardy.

"To-morrow morning at eight, in a grove on the banks of the river. If you will permit me, I shall

call for you at half-past seven with my sledge, and shall drive you there."

"I shall be deeply indebted to you. And now, if you will take no offense, I shall ask you to excuse me, as I must get a good night's rest. There is no medicine like sleep, and plenty of it, to make the hand steady and the eye clear."

The young Russian glanced at the other admiringly.

"You have the nerve of a Russian!"

"Or of an American," replied Hardy, smiling. "You will find me ready at seven-thirty, and don't fail to be on time. We must not be one second late at this rendezvous."

Left to himself, Hardy sat for a long time with his head in his hands, thinking.

Of his ability to kill Romanoff at the distance agreed on,—thirty paces,—he had not the slightest doubt. He was also aware that he stood a chance himself of being wounded, or of losing his life. Romanoff enjoyed the reputation of being a fair shot, though how much this meant in Russia, Hardy had no means of judging. Probably not much, according to American standards; but even a poor shot will sometimes hit the mark.

Was the Princess in love with her cousin? The

more Hardy debated this possibility in his mind, the more it took on the shape and tangibility of probability. That she had commanded the Prince to fight was no proof against the supposition. She came of fighting blood, and the man she loved must be no coward. Moreover, Hardy had taken advantage of her own princely word to himself, and had claimed fulfilment of the promise that she had made to him.

Romanoff was handsome as a god, brave, masterful, impetuous, of high birth; the sort of man, it seemed to Hardy, to appeal to a woman like the Princess.

"And I," he laughed bitterly, "am a merchant here in her autocratic and aristocratic Russia,—a merchant who owes her sufferance of me to the fact that I can shoot straight!"

He said nothing that night to Wang of the impending duel, but the boy seemed aware that some danger threatened his master, or that the latter was gravely troubled about something. Although told several times, kindly, to go to bed, he returned as often, and hovered about Hardy. Indeed, Wang responded to Hardy's moods with that delicacy of understanding sometimes seen in a dog for its master, or a woman for the man she loves.

"Well, Wang," said Hardy at last, "you may sit up all night if you choose, but I, for one, am going to get some sleep. Good night!"—and he retired to his own room.

He began to undress slowly and absent-mindedly, standing for long minutes motionless in the middle of the floor, or dropping into a chair, in deep thought, as though he were confronted by some weighty problem that he could not solve. He turned off the light at last and crept into bed, but he was destined to be again disturbed by Wang, who tapped timidly at the door.

"That boy is becoming a nuisance!" he muttered; "there is such a thing as too much devotion. Well, Wang!" he shouted sharply.

"If you please," called Wang, "here is a note for you."

Hardy arose, went to the door, and took a letter from the boy's hand.

"Wait," he commanded, "till I see if there is an answer."

He tore open the envelope and read:

MY FRIEND:

I have just learned that the duel is to take place in the morning, and that pistols are the weapons chosen. You know that I gave my consent to this

deplorable affair because you asked me in terms that left me no choice. I am going now to beg something of you: it is that you spare my headstrong and violent cousin's life. He wronged you outrageously, I know, and in the name of the Romanoff family, I humbly beg your pardon for that wrong. But should you kill him,—and your wonderful skill places his life entirely in your hands,—I should feel that his blood is on my head. Will you not grant a distracted woman's prayer and spare his life? Wound him, if you will, but, oh, do not kill him! By granting this request, you will place under still deeper obligations one who already owes you more than she can ever hope to repay.

ELIZABETHA ROMANOVNA.

As he read, Hardy turned pale to the lips. He tore the note in small bits and dropped them into a waste paper basket.

"Is there any answer, dear master?" called the voice of Wang through the door.

"No," replied Hardy, "there is no answer."

CHAPTER XL

THE DUEL

Frederick Courtland Hardy slept poorly that night. The typical hero of romance, when about to fight a duel at break of day, goes to bed and sleeps more soundly than ever before in his life. This deep slumber proves his iron nerve more incontrovertably than any amount of swash-buckling bravado or any number of great oaths could do. But we are not dealing with a typical hero of romance.

Hardy, as he tossed about for hours on the bed, felt genuine disgust at himself that he was unable to go to sleep. He experienced no fear, and he had a feeling that it was irregular for a gentleman to lie awake under such circumstances.

About midnight it occurred to him that it might be a good thing to make his will. Such a document already existed, but he now arose and, putting on dressing-gown and slippers, went out into the office. Lighting the gas, he wrote the following :

Moscow, January 7, 1904.

Being of sound mind and in possession of all my faculties, I write this as a codicil to my will, now in the keeping of Andrew Mackey, Esq., Attorney at Law, Boston. I hereby will and bequeath all my ready money, deposited in the Russo-Kitaisky Bank at Stryetensk, and amounting to something over six thousand roubles, to my faithful secretary, Wang, and I heartily commend the said Wang to the favorable notice of Frederick Emery, President of the American Trading Company in Siberia. The boy is faithful, honest, and possesses a degree of business ability quite astonishing in one so young.

FREDERICK COURTLAND HARDY.

This he folded and put in an envelope on which he wrote with a lead pencil, "For Wang." Tossing the envelope on a table in his sleeping-room, he went back to bed, and at last succeeded in getting to sleep. He was awakened by Gortchakov pounding upon his door and shouting:

"Get up, my friend, get up! We shall be late for the rendezvous!"

Hardy dressed hurriedly and went out to his second, who was waiting in the office.

"See, I have ordered coffee for you," said the lieutenant, "and here it comes. I took the liberty because we have no time to lose. Drink a cup now,

and we shall be back in an hour, in time for breakfast, after you have killed his Highness!"

The lieutenant was in unusually high spirits over the prospect, and his boyish face beamed genially. Hardy sighed as he gulped down his steaming coffee. Gortchakov desired Romanoff out of the way that his own chances with the Princess might be improved; but it never for a moment occurred to him to take the American into consideration. A princess and a tradesman! The very idea was absurd.

Hardy had struggled into his overcoat.

"Well, I am ready," he said. "Let's be going, and have this business over."

As they passed out they met Wang, who glanced anxiously at his master.

"I am going to take an early ride with the lieutenant," he explained; "it's a fine morning for riding, Wang." But he added in a low tone to Gortchakov: "If anything should happen to me, let that boy know immediately. He is devoted to me. In case the worst should happen, there is a paper on the dresser in my bedroom, leaving him a small sum of money. I have had no time to have it attested, but you can bear witness that I told you the thing was genuine."

The lieutenant's sledge and beautiful team of thoroughbreds was waiting at the curb.

"Jump in, pray," he said, "and let's be off. And we musn't talk of anything's happening. There is nothing going to happen except that you will shoot a great rascal and bully through the heart, and we shall come back to a hearty breakfast, having done a good morning's work with very little waste of time."

Gortchakov had now fixed on Romanoff's heart as the most pleasing receptacle for Hardy's bullet.

The coachman cracked his long whip and the high-strung, nervous steeds gave a great bound and went scurrying through the early streets of the Muscovite capital. In half an hour they had reached their destination, a thick wood on the banks of the Moskva. Hardy's other second was already on the spot with a surgeon, a fat little man, wrapped thick in furs, who walked briskly to and fro in the snow, carrying a case of instruments.

"You are in good time, gentlemen," cried Gortchakov, consulting his watch, "there are still ten minutes to spare."

"I think I hear sleigh-bells now," said the surgeon. "I hope it is Romanoff, so that I can get back to my warm bed. What the devil people want to

come out in such weather as this, is more than I can understand. Let them shoot each other and be damned, if they want to, but not at this hour and in such weather."

"We shall try to be expeditious," said Hardy cheerfully, "and, in the meantime, I beg pardon for my share in the inconvenience to which we are putting you. You're right about the sleigh-bells. Here are our friends now."

Through a vista between the leafless trees a sledge could be seen approaching, drawn by three horses, running like mad. The driver rose to his feet and settled back on the seat, bringing them to a rearing, pawing, sudden halt.

"Your servants, gentlemen," said Koukolnik, lifting his hat. "We trust we have not kept you waiting."

"And yours," replied Gortchakov, returning the salutation, in which the others joined. "You are just on the minute, if my watch is right."

"You are fast," said Koukolnik, climbing laboriously from the sledge, his timepiece in his hand. "We are five minutes ahead."

"I will wager you a hundred roubles I am right," insisted Gortchakov, with the Russian's ever-present mania for gambling.

"Done!" replied Koukolnik; "and now, let's to business."

The details were soon arranged and the ground measured off. Hardy did not pay any attention to these preliminaries, but walked briskly backward and forward to keep his feet warm, glancing occasionally at Romanoff, who stood leaning against a tree, his hands in his ulster pockets, an insolent, careless smile on his handsome face. He certainly was a splendid specimen of manhood, thought the American, and if he felt the least tremor of fear, he knew how to disguise it. Did it seem at all unlikely that a high-bred, aristocratic woman, the daughter of a hundred warriors, should have fallen in love with a man like that?

"It is time now, my friend," said Gortchakov, coming up to Hardy. "I must trouble you to remove your coat. But you will not catch cold, for it will only take you a minute. Upon my word, I admire your nerve. You ought to have been a Russian. You will shoot him at the word 'three'!"

Hardy removed his ulster and faced his opponent. A long dueling pistol of excellent make and perfect precision was placed in his hand.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked Koukolnik. "I will count three, slowly. You will raise your

weapons and take aim when I commence, and will fire at the word 'three'."

As these words were being uttered, Hardy fixed his eye-glasses more firmly on his nose, the while he examined the distance and the person of his antagonist with a cool, practised glance.

Koukolnik began.

"Odeen!"

The two weapons were raised and pointed.

"Dvah!"

It could not be seen that the hand of either man trembled in the slightest.

"Tra!"

Two shots rang out, almost simultaneously.

Neither man fell.

"Hell and furies!" cried Romanoff, throwing his pistol to the earth. "I have missed him. This weapon is utterly worthless. I demand another shot."

"Very well," replied Hardy quietly; "but if we shoot again, I shall shoot to kill. I beg that you will inform his Highness of my intentions, at the same time conveying to him the assurance of my most distinguished consideration."

"You have missed," whispered Gortchakov petulantly. "Why did you do this? You're as cool this

minute as I am. Are you sure you have not wounded him?"

"My principal demands another shot," said Koukolnik, advancing. "He presents his compliments to Mr. Hardy, and suggests that he has not done justice to his great reputation for skill. Perhaps he will get better control of his nerves, now that he has escaped danger once, and his hand will not tremble as much as it evidently has done this time."

"Tell the Prince for me that, if we shoot again, I shall do myself the honor of lodging a ball exactly midway between his eyes."

Koukolnik started for the Prince with the message. He had not traversed over half the distance when Hardy said:

"I am faint, lieutenant. Let me lean on you for a moment."

"My God, you are wounded!" cried Gortchakov, putting his arm about the American's waist; and, indeed, a dark stain, rapidly spreading, dyed his waistcoat and shirt-front.

"I—I am slightly wounded," gasped Hardy, and fainted away.

"What's the matter there with our man?" asked Romanoff in a voice that made no attempt to conceal a sneer. "He seems to be slightly weary. I thought

I must have hit him. How is it, surgeon? Have I done his business for him?"

"He is seriously wounded, I fear," replied the surgeon. "Get his coat about him. Here, lift him into the sledge. Let me get in with you. Now, drive like mad; drive, I say!"

CHAPTER XLI

THE GOLD CUFF BUTTON

By the surgeon's orders, Gortchakov drove directly to a hospital, where Hardy was laid upon a bed and his wound examined and dressed. The Prince's bullet had passed through the flesh beneath the shoulder, making a clean perforation—a painful but not a dangerous wound. Hardy revived in the sledge, and to Gortchakov's demand why he had shot so badly, made no reply other than :

“The best-intentioned bullets sometimes go astray. I turn him over to you, lieutenant; I have not deprived you of the pleasure of killing him yourself.”

His coat and shirt were cut away from his chest at the hospital, and a young grub of an intern assisted the surgeon in washing the wound and passing a silk handkerchief through it,—an operation that caused the patient to bite his nether lip till it bled, but did not draw a groan from him.

"You will be all right in about a month," said the surgeon, on taking his leave, "but I beg you, if you think of fighting again, either to postpone your little affair till the spring breezes begin to blow, or don't call on me to assist you. I shall have chilblains as a result of your foolishness, that may cause me more suffering than your nasty little puncture."

Gortchakov departed in a surly humor, evidently disgruntled because his principal had failed to remove the lieutenant's chief rival, as he supposed, to another sphere, where they neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Hardy was left alone with a large-boned, florid nurse of peasant type, and the young grub of an intern, who was disposed to be inquisitive as to the cause of the wound.

He rid himself of the intern by pretending that he desired to sleep, and then sent the nurse to telephone for Wang.

The boy arrived about noon.

"What has happened, my dear master?" he sobbed, sinking on his knees beside the cot, and taking one of Hardy's hands in both his own. "Are you wounded? Have you been attacked? Have you met with an accident? Tell me, I beg of you! You do not know how I have suffered with fear and

anxiety, as I felt that you were about to encounter some terrible danger. And you left me this—this,—” producing the will and tearing it into bits, “to increase my anxiety. Did you think that money could have compensated me for your loss? Oh, it was cruel of you—cruel!”

“Will you be kind enough to leave us alone?” said Hardy to the nurse. “This is my secretary, and I have some communications of a private nature to make to him.”

“But the doctor said you were not to be left alone, and that you were not to talk,” objected the nurse, who was, like the intern, consumed with curiosity.

“Go, I say!” commanded Hardy, his pain causing him to give way to the anger which this meddlesome persistence aroused in him. “Or, here! In my coat there—or in the ruins of it—you will find a pocket-book. Take from it a ten-rouble note. No, in the other pocket. That’s it. There! I will give you the ten roubles if you will go out into the hall immediately and not come back until I send for you. I—I am not in a mood to enjoy feminine society now, however charming,” he added whimsically. “If you respond to my wishes during the time that I have the pleasure of being with you, I shall see that you are liberally rewarded. Do you comprehend?”

"*Da, da, da, da!*" replied the girl with quick understanding, and glided from the room.

"There!" said Hardy kindly, touched by the boy's concern. "Get up and sit in that chair. Bring it here by the side of the bed, and I'll tell you all about it. I, an American, Frederick Courtland Hardy, of Boston, Massachusetts, have fought a duel, and, I suspect, about a woman!"

"A—a woman?" stammered Wang, turning suddenly pale.

"As nearly as I can find out. I was calling on the Princess Romanovna, paying her my respects, when in came her cousin, the Prince Romanoff, and insulted me so grossly that I deemed it my duty to demand satisfaction of him. I strongly suspect that his Highness' antipathy to me is rooted chiefly in the fact that I, on one occasion, saved the life of his fair cousin. He struck me in the face, Wang."

As the American said these words his own countenance flushed with shame.

"He struck you!" cried the Korean. "I could spit on his corpse. I could spurn it with my foot!"

"I have no doubt you could, thereby displaying your devotion to my unworthy self. Your plan is impracticable, however, for the simple reason that there is no corpse. Romanoff is alive and well at

the present moment and is no doubt gloating over my discomfiture."

"He is not even wounded?" asked the boy.

"Not even wounded."

"But why did you not kill him when you had the opportunity? It surely would not have been difficult to hit that great hulk of flesh. Is it then safe to strike an American gentleman in the face?"

"N—ot always. My reasons for not killing him are too complicated for a boy to understand. They involve a lady's sanction of a duel, and then her subsequent nullifying of that sanction. They involve, in general, a lady's request, which can hardly be overlooked when she is, in reality, the cause of the hatred which made the meeting necessary. Do you follow me, Wang?"

"I—I think I do," replied the boy wearily. "You spared him because the Princess asked you to. You have been magnanimous, whatever the cost to yourself, and given the Princess her admirer, for whom, in his moment of extreme peril, she found that she cared more than she had supposed. And now you are done with the whole Romanoff family!"

Hardy forgot his pain for the moment and stared at the boy in open-mouthed wonderment.

"If you were not a boy," he said at last, sinking

back on the pillow, "I should think you were a woman. Your intuition in such matters is positively marvelous. And now I mustn't talk too much, for it makes this shoulder ache like a bad tooth. I must get well, and we must go back to Stryetensk and the store. But there is one little thing that I want you to do for me. Go to the place where the duel was fought this morning. I shall describe the location exactly to you. Romanoff stood near a large oak-tree whose trunk divides about six feet from the ground into two trunks equal in size. Look about there and see if you can find in the snow a gold cuff button. It is there, and, shining against the white, should be easily found. Bring it to me as quickly as possible."

"But, my dear master, I want to stay and nurse you, care for you. Who should do this but me? I—you don't know what a good nurse I am. You have no idea!"

"I don't doubt it in the least, Wang. But if you desire to please me you will bring me that cuff button. Go, now, I am in too much pain to bear opposition meekly: Listen now. This is where the meeting took place."

Hardy described the locality in a few clear sentences.

"Take a sledge and drive there. You should not be gone over an hour."

Wang left without another word.

Not long after the boy's departure the nurse brought in a bouquet of priceless orchids, which she arranged in a vase and set on a table near his bed.

"An *izvoschik* brought them," she explained to Hardy. "Here is the note that came with them."

She handed him a tiny billet-doux and raised one of the shades. Holding the note in his teeth, he opened the envelope with his good hand, and read:

My Friend: I do not know what your feelings are toward my unhappy self. I had no idea that this deplorable affair would end as it has. Will you allow me to come in person and express my regret, and do whatever lies in my power to alleviate your sufferings? Thank God you are not killed!

ELIZABETHA ROMANOVNA.

"Tell the man that there is no answer at present," said Hardy to the nurse.

Wang was gone two hours. When he arrived he came straight to Hardy's couch and handed him a small gold object, with a bit of linen hanging to it.

"Here it is," he said; "it is stamped with the crest of the Romanoff family. I thought you had lost one of your own cuff buttons."

"Bring paper and envelopes," Hardy requested of the nurse, "and then leave us alone for a few minutes."

The woman complied.

"Now take my indelible pen from my waistcoat pocket and write."

Wang sat down at the table and looked inquiringly at his master.

"Your Highness," dictated Hardy, "I hope that you will not give yourself the slightest uneasiness on my account. My wound is a very trifling matter, from which I shall soon recover. I am greatly honored by your kind offer to call and see me, but I must deny myself the pleasure of receiving you. I can not allow you to compromise your exalted position by thus yielding to the dictates of your good heart. Will you allow me to add that I feel I have already trespassed too far on your good nature and am quite unwilling to continue the infliction? As you have frequently admired my skill with the pistol, I am inclosing a little trophy of the same, his Highness' cuff button, which I hope will convince you that I have not disappointed your expectations. Will you kindly hand it to him with my compliments? Wishing you all happiness in the years to come, I remain

"Your humble servant,

"FREDERICK COURTLAND HARDY."

Wang laughed—a queer, hard little laugh of mingled exultation and hate. Without waiting for any further directions from his master, he put the cuff button in the envelope with the note, sealed it and directed it to the Princess Romanovna.

“You will take that to the Princess’ palace,” directed Hardy, “and give it into her Highness’ own hands.”

CHAPTER XLII

MURDER AND MYSTERY

Hardy was able to leave the hospital on February the first, and return to his quarters at the hotel, where he was much more comfortable, for the hospitals of Moscow are inferior to those of other European cities of equal size. He was pale and weak, but his appetite was good and he was gaining strength rapidly. Though he had come off second-best in the duel, to all appearances, yet his countenance had taken on a look not in any way characteristic of the man who has been beaten or cowed by punishment. There was something new in his eyes, and there was an expression about his mouth that suggested rather the man who has fought a mental fight and won. In his conversations with Wang he avoided all mention either of the Princess or of her cousin. His only desire was to close up the business in Moscow and get back to Stryetensk as soon as possible,—get back to the

warehouses and the great water highway that led eastward to the Pacific Ocean, to that frontier of the vast Russian Empire that lies close to Korea and scowls across the Japan Sea at Nippon and its hive of angry, buzzing bees. In the preparations for departure the Korean boy displayed a competency and assiduity that were a revelation even to Hardy. He superintended the shipment to Stryetensk of large orders of goods, he made valuable suggestions, he worked till all hours of the night, relieving his principal of the labor of correspondence and book-keeping. In addition, he was a cheerful and even amusing companion, whose brain was fertile in delicate little attentions that made Hardy's enforced detention in the hotel less irksome.

Meanwhile, letters from Emery and other advices were insistent to the effect that war was inevitable.

In Moscow, however, there was a general feeling that the conflict would be long delayed, if, indeed, it ever took place. Hardy took this view of the matter in discussing it one day with his secretary.

"You see, Wang," he said, "Russia has the situation entirely in her keeping. Japan will hardly dare to attack this vast, colossal power, and Russia will simply wear her out by evasive, unproductive diplomacy."

"Wait and see!" cried Wang, "wait and see whether Japan will attack or not! Japan is a compact, sinewy body, trained to exquisite skill, with but one thought, one purpose. Russia is a great, unwieldy, conglomerate hulk, torn with dissensions. She is a house of cards, the temple of the Philistines, which Japan will tumble down, though this Samson is not blind, nor will he perish in the ruins."

"Are all Koreans as great Japanese sympathizers as you are?" asked Hardy. "One would think, from what he sees in the papers here and from what he hears, that Korea desires the protection of Russia."

Wang laughed.

"The Japanese and the Koreans are cousins," he replied, "first cousins, and they understand each other. Japan will awaken the yellow races from the slumber of centuries and will lead them in the vanguard of civilization. With this awakening will come also a knowledge of power and rights. Do you know that China is now filled with emissaries of the Japanese government—missionaries—teaching the authorities and the people the plans of Russia and of the other white races, and giving them a knowledge of their own strength, if they are properly armed and disciplined, and of the weakness of

their enemies? If Japan needs China she will call on her. But she will not need her. I tell you that one hundred thousand Japanese troops can make their way from Vladivostok to Petersburg and lay the capital of the czar in ruins!"

"Whew!" exclaimed Hardy; "this is indeed the other side of the question. I had no idea that you—you Asiatics—were so confident as all that! You forget the great Napoleon and his expedition to Moscow!"

On the morning of the seventh Wang came into the office and laid a paper down before Hardy, pointing, without a word, to a double-led article with "scare" head-lines.

JAPAN ENRAGED

HER MINISTER LEAVES PETERSBURG

The mikado, in a fit of rage, withdraws Count Kurino from the Russian capital—Peppery yellow people unable to conduct civilized diplomatic negotiations—The czar's calm and dignified course

Hardy glanced through the article, which set forth at length the Russian government's reasonable and righteous course, as alleged by the writer, and the hot-headed, childish and unwarrantable demands of the islanders.

"Well," he commented, "even this does not mean war. Russia will simply wait—she has always been waiting, and the Japanese must strike the first blow if she wants war."

"Wait and see," was Wang's only reply.

It was only two days later that Hardy became aware that something extraordinary had happened. Toward evening the city was seized with excitement. Some great, some terrible news was in the air. Men were talking excitedly in the corridors of the hotel, groups were gathering in the streets, hoarsely shouting. Wang was out, so Hardy rang for a bell-boy and asked him what was the matter.

"Matter!" cried the boy; "the Japanese have captured Port Arthur! They have murdered a hundred thousand Christians. They have sunk the whole Russian fleet, treacherously, falsely, in the night. The czar will send a great army and kill every cursed Japanese on earth. I am going, Ivan Nekressov is going—we are all going. Curse the Japanese!"

"My God!" exclaimed Hardy as the excited boy left, slamming the door, "they are at it in earnest, and the Japanese have struck hard. This means war, indeed. If the Russian navy has been destroyed it means a long war. Wang will be wild."

At this moment the Korean entered, but, to Hardy's surprise, he was not carried away by excitement. There was a hectic spot on each yellow cheek, and his eyes were burning, but he was self-contained.

"Well, Wang," said Hardy, "you were right, after all, and the Japanese have attacked. I have heard some very wild rumors. Have you learned anything definite?"

"Yes," replied Wang; "what seem to be reliable reports have arrived. The mikado's fleet last night attacked the Russian ships at Port Arthur and sank the *Czarevitch* and the *Retvizan*, two of the heaviest battle-ships in the czar's navy, and the *Pallada*, a cruiser. The Russians are very indignant, naturally, but they should save their feelings. The Japanese have only begun."

Within two weeks after the breaking out of the war, during which time many disastrous blows were struck at the naval prestige of Russia, Hardy was ready for the long railway journey back to Stryetensk.

The American was considerably emaciated and not yet entirely recovered from the effects of his wound, but he believed himself able to travel, especially under such favorable conditions as those

offered by a compartment in the "*train luxus*," and he was impatient to get out of Moscow.

Perhaps, having definitely and resolutely put the Princess Romanovna out of his life, he felt that it would be easier to forget her if he went where there would be no danger of seeing her again. Of one thing he was certain,—that he wanted work, money, power. Despite the fact that he knew himself to be a gentleman, according to the standards of the race from which he sprang, he was now in Russia, where the Princess belonged to one class and he to another, and her sympathies were with her own people, as his experience in the late encounter with Romanoff had seemed to show him.

He had figured as a knight-errant long enough. He was a tradesman: that was the calling that had brought him to this country, and it was time for him to be about his business.

Wang secured a first-class compartment for his master, and second-class accommodations for himself, and the two drove to the great terminal station, which commodious building they found crowded with officers of every rank, military officials and Red-Cross nurses hastening to Vladivostok and the front.

Among these, Hardy noticed the gallant, towering

form of Boris Romanoff, attired in officer's cap and cloak. The Prince was surrounded by a group of officers, with whom he was talking. He noticed Hardy and gave him a look of hate. The American turned his eyes quickly away and busied himself with identifying his baggage and getting it aboard.

On the morning of the third day out from Moscow the Prince was found murdered in his compartment. He was lying peacefully sleeping in his berth, the last long sleep, with a slender stiletto sticking in his heart.

CHAPTER XLIII

WANG AS A WITNESS

This tragic occurrence occasioned tremendous excitement on the *train luxus*, which was stopped at the next station and surrounded by a band of Cossacks. Here it was kept for three days until a squad of police and detectives could be hurried to the scene from Moscow. Numerous arrests were made and many of the passengers were questioned separately.

Wang was one of those examined. He was taken into a small, bare room on the second floor of the station, where sat a shrewd old man at a pine table. He was flanked by two younger officers, while a stenographer, stylographic pen in hand, bent over a writing-pad.

"Your name is Wang?" said the officer.

"It is."

"Wang what?"

"Just Wang."

"What is your nationality?"

"I am a Korean."

"You are in the employ of the alleged American, Frederick Courtland Hardy?"

"I am in the employ of the American, Frederick Courtland Hardy."

"Be careful, sir, do not be insolent. Do not attempt to amend the expressions of the court. Make a note there—'witness very intelligent and inclined to be insolent'— Got it down? Very well. How do you know that he is an American?"

"Because he says he is."

"Oh, ah! very well. Tell us what you know of the duel which was fought on January eighth between this alleged American, Hardy, and his Highness, the Prince Boris Romanoff. Speak the truth, or it will be the worse for you!"

"I know nothing of the duel which your Honor alluded to as having taken place," replied Wang. The boy showed not the slightest sign of fear. His yellow face was flushed, he held his head high and looked the judge defiantly in the eyes.

"You know nothing of it?" roared the latter. "Do not attempt to deceive the court. We know more than you think. Did not this Hardy tell you that he had fought a duel with his Highness?"

"He told me also that he was an American," re-

plied Wang, "and since your Honor intimates that his word is unreliable—"

"Make another note—'witness insolent'—did he or did he not tell you that such a duel had been fought?"

"He did."

"Ah! he did! That he was seriously wounded in that duel as a result of his Highness' superior coolness and marksmanship, we know. We also are acquainted with the causes of said duel: that his Highness was obliged to chastise this Hardy for presumption and insolence; and that it was in accordance with the request of the Princess, his cousin, that his Highness shot him. All this we know. You must tell us what threats of vengeance the wounded man breathed out against the Prince."

"None at all, your Honor—absolutely none at all," replied Wang, turning pale, as he saw the drift of the questions.

"None at all! But this is incredible. We shall find means of making you speak the truth. Repeat now those threats to us, and be careful that you conceal nothing."

"He not only uttered no such threats," said Wang, "but he even spared the worthless life of the Prince, when he might have shot him dead. This he did

out of regard for the Princess, as he is a very knightly and perfect gentleman. He shot off Romanoff's cuff button, which he sent to her as proof of his wonderful skill, and of how he employed it on that occasion."

"A pretty story, this!" laughed the judge. "Do you not think so, gentlemen?"

Both gentlemen thought exactly as did their chief.

"I myself," insisted Wang, "went to the place of meeting, at Mr. Hardy's request, and picked up the cuff button, which I gave into the hand of the Princess, who will, I have no doubt, corroborate my statement."

The judge looked sharply at Wang for several moments, and the boy returned the stare defiantly.

"Lock the witness up again," he commanded, and the order was obeyed.

Wang was kept in close confinement for four days, at the end of which time he was released and informed that nothing further was required of him by the police, who doubtless regarded him as an unsatisfactory witness. He found himself standing alone on the platform of a small railway station, facing the desolate, snow-covered plains. In the distance was a miserable peasant village, with thatched roofs. The *train luxus*, the police, all the passengers, the

mortal remains of the murdered Prince, were gone. The boy asked a stolid-faced station-master what had become of his employer, and the latter only shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

Wang entered the station, sat down on a bench and thought for a long time. Then he came out on the platform and walked up and down for an hour—for two hours, after which he entered the station and passed another hour on the bench. Though he had not eaten since noon, he did not feel hungry. Toward midnight a man entered the ticket office, opened the window and lighted a lamp. Wang stepped up to the window.

“Do you expect a train?” he asked.

“Yes, in half an hour.”

“Going which way?”

“To Moscow.”

“How much is the fare?”

The agent told him, and the boy found that he had enough money with him to pay for a third-class ticket and leave a few roubles over, sufficient to buy food. He procured a ticket, and when the train thundered up to the station he boarded it and soon was speeding back to the Muscovite capital. Arriving there after two days and three nights of agonizing suspense, during which the ponderous train seemed

to him to crawl like a giant caterpillar over the vast stretches of virgin white, he found himself again in the great station and hastened immediately to the Slaviansky Bazar.

The clerk recognized him, and from the clerk Wang learned that his employer had been taken to St. Petersburg and there lodged in prison, charged with the murder of Boris Romanoff.

"The proof against him is clear," vouchsafed the self-important and voluble clerk, "and I am sorry for him, though he deserves all he will get. You will never see him or hear from him again. He is, no doubt, at this moment rotting away in a foul, damp dungeon beneath the river Neva, feeding on moldy bread and stinking water, and little of that. Prisoners that run foul of the nobility in Russia have a way of disappearing, and God knows what they suffer! But I feel sorry for him, I say, for he was a courteous gentleman, and liberal with his tips."

It was now about ten o'clock in the morning, and Wang went straight to the palace of the Princess Romanovna. The pompous butler informed him that it would be impossible to see her Highness, but vouchsafed to take a note to the Princess, which Wang wrote in French, much to the butler's disgust. The door was shut in Wang's face, but he was not

left standing in the cold for more than twenty minutes. At the end of that time the butler threw wide the door and announced:

“Well, her Highness consents to see you, after all. Remember your manners, young man, and if you have any begging scheme, don’t impose on her too much. She has a very soft heart.”

Wang disappeared within the palace.

CHAPTER XLIV

A PRINCESS AND A WOMAN

The Princess Romanovna received Wang in a small library on the second floor. She was walking to and fro, with her hands clasped behind her back, and her lovely brows knit in thought, the while she dictated letters to her secretary. The boy's keen glance detected that she was pale. As he entered and stood by the door, silently waiting, she turned to him eagerly and said:

"Well! What is this communication that you have to make to me? Do you bring me a letter?"

"I must see you alone," replied Wang. There was something in his manner and expression that could not be denied. The Princess turned toward her secretary, saying:

"You may leave the room until I ring for you, Olga."

"But surely," protested Olga, "your Highness does not wish to be left alone with this stranger? Let me stay, I beg of you, to protect you!"

Romanovna smiled.

"I fear you would be of small protection in case of danger. Besides," glancing at the boy's slight form, "this young man does not look like a dangerous person. Go, I insist!"

The girl gathered up her papers and left the room at once.

"Do you know where my master is?" demanded Wang in perfect Russian.

"Your master?"

"Yes, or my employer, if you will, though I love to call him my master. I mean the American, Frederick Courtland Hardy."

"Oh! So you are the Korean boy of whom I have heard,—his secretary? No, my poor boy, I do not know where he is, further than that he is in prison in St. Petersburg charged with a terrible crime, on presumptive evidence so strong that his conviction is almost certain. Was he a kind master to you?" asked the Princess. "Do you love him very much? Why, what is the matter?"

Wang turned an ashen color, reeled as if wounded and caught at the knob of a door.

"No—nothing," he gasped, "just a little faintness—the heat of the room, perhaps. I am all right now. Mr. Hardy is the kindest man that I have

ever known—and the bravest and truest gentleman that walks the earth.”

“I am glad to hear him so well spoken of,” said the Princess. Her hands were still clasped behind her back as she stood gazing fixedly at Wang. “My acquaintance with him would lead me to have the same opinion, were it not for this terrible accusation, so strongly substantiated by evidence.”

She was talking with this wonderful boy as though he were an equal.

“And do you believe this accusation—you, who love him? Shame upon you! Does not your heart tell you that he is innocent?”

It was now the Romanovna’s turn to grow pale and stagger, as though she had been struck a physical blow.

“How dare you?” she cried; “you insolent boy! Did he tell you that I loved him? But no! He is a gentleman. He could not do such a thing. But something, though it can not be my heart, tells me that he is innocent.”

“Then something tells you right,” said Wang quietly, “for he did not kill your worthless cousin. I killed him!”

“You—you killed him!” Her expression, as she said these words, denoted perplexity, quickly fol-

lowed by pity. "You poor boy!" she cried, "your sufferings have affected your mind. Those little hands have never committed murder—and such a terrible murder!"

"Listen," said Wang, "and you will understand and believe. The Prince Romanoff hated my master from the beginning of his acquaintance with him, because he could not make him his tool. In Japan, where the Prince came as a spy, he attempted to throw suspicion on Mr. Hardy, but did not succeed in getting him into any serious trouble. His hatred was increased on the Amur because it was my master who saved your life, and not he. The affair of the duel, in which the American figured as the real hero by sparing his life at your request, changed his animosity into a resentment which Mr. Hardy's death alone could have satisfied."

"But how do you know all these things?"

"I know the main facts, and I am not stupid. The cuff button which I brought to you, for it was I who brought the button and the note—"

"I remember you now," said the Princess cordially, "though I scarcely glanced at you at that time."

"That cuff button you returned to the Prince with an explanation, for you are too genuine a woman

and your regard for Mr. Hardy is too great to allow the Prince to wound him and gloat over his supposed triumph."

The Princess was staring at the boy as though fascinated.

"Yes, I gave the Prince the cuff button!" she murmured.

"I overheard the Prince talking in the station at Moscow with two of his associates. He mentioned the name of Hardy with murderous hate, and I shadowed them for two days. I learned that the Prince was planning to kill my master. They were going to have the coach in which he was traveling blown up with dynamite and the rumor spread that a mistake had been made, as has happened before, and that the explosion had been intended for the car containing Romanoff and some of the nobles. I overheard the words, 'This Jew must die!' and I knew that if a noble like Romanoff had determined on the death of a man without powerful friends he would accomplish his end. I could not expose them, for how could the word of a boy like me, a despised Korean, stand against that of the Prince Romanoff? So, to save the life of my master, I killed Romanoff. I crept into his compartment at night when he was sleeping in a drunken stupor and

thrust a stiletto into his heart. He sighed—a long sigh—shuddered, and kept on sleeping.”

“Horrible! Horrible!” whispered the Princess. “But why do you tell me this, you dreadful boy? What use do you wish me to make of this terrible secret of yours? Do you not know that I must give you up to the police?”

“I thought perhaps you could save Mr. Hardy’s life in some way without betraying me. Romanoff was your cousin, and you are distantly related to the czar. I had a wild hope that perhaps you could tell his Majesty that you knew the name of the assassin, which you could not honorably divulge, and that the crime was committed under great provocation. I imagined that maybe you would do that for the one who saved the man who saved you! I do not value my own life highly, but I think that I would like to go back to my own country, to see the smoke rise from the Sacred Mountain once more before I die, and to hear again the song of the cicadas and the nightingales. But if this is not possible, I am quite willing to give myself up. No, he must not die!” cried Wang, “nor languish another day in prison! I loved him when he first kissed my lips there by the sea at Hakodate, by the light of the Japanese moon. I longed for him night and day with a longing that

grew as the days went by. And when I was sent to Manchuria to influence the chiefs against Russia, and tell them of the great war that was coming, I was so near that I said, 'I will see him once more.' So I came to Stryetensk, and when I had seen him I could not leave him again. When I saw that he did not recognize me I said, 'I will stay with him.' Oh, what joy it has been to work for him, to hear his voice! Do you doubt that I am ready to die for him, if it need be?"

It was the voice of a woman who was speaking.

"Who are you?" asked the Princess, "you who, for love, have done this dreadful deed of hate?"

"I am Aisome Mosuro, known in my own country as Aisome, the Fox. I am supposed to be cunning, brave, heartless and patriotic to the last drop of blood in my body. I am in the secret service of my country, and have been one of its most trusted agents. I speak many of the languages of Europe and all the dialects of China. And yet I am a woman—just a woman, who, at the chrismal touch of a man's lips, find my whole nature changed, and am ready to give up all for him, friends, country, individuality, yes, even life itself, happy only if I can be near him, can serve him, can hear his voice! I—when I think of it all, I am ashamed of myself,"

sobbed the girl, pressing a handkerchief to her eyes, "but I can not help it. I am even now asking you to save me, if you can, for his sake. I can never see him again. He will know now that I am not Wang, the Korean boy, and, besides, my hands are stained with blood. But he would be distracted if he knew that I were in the hands of the Russian authorities; he would be unhappy all his life if they were to kill me. For he loved Wang, though he has forgotten poor Aisome. I am asking you to save me for his sake, and let me go away to my own country. You do not despise me, do you, and you do not fear me?"

"I neither fear nor despise you," replied the Princess sorrowfully, "though I shrink with horror from your dreadful deed. You are a woman and a sister, and I will save you if I can, for I believe you. Alas! I knew too well my cousin's revengeful and violent nature. Listen! I shall see the czar and use my woman's wits to clear Mr. Hardy without giving the name of the actual perpetrator. I am going to Port Arthur to take charge of a hospital there for our sick and wounded heroes. You must remain here in my house till I return from St. Petersburg, and then go with me to the sea-coast, whence I will send you across to Japan. I believe

that Mr. Hardy would wish this, and there is nothing I would not do for his sake, within honor. But if I find that it is necessary, in order to save his life—”

“—to tell my name? Then tell it, and I shall be here to say that you speak the truth!”

CHAPTER XLV

IMPERIAL FAVOR

The Princess Romanovna was received by his Imperial Majesty in a small room of the Winter Palace, a room which, equipped with graceful and dainty furniture of the sixteenth century, was a cheerful symphony in a delicate shade of blue. The fact that she was a favorite at court, together with her high connections and her noble descent, through which she even claimed distant relationship with the imperial family itself, rendered it comparatively easy for her to obtain a private and informal interview.

His Majesty was standing when Romanovna entered, looking out of the window on the semicircle where stands the huge monolith in honor of Alexander the First. He turned, as her name was announced, and smiled. She noticed that he was pale and careworn, and that his expression, even as he smiled, was very sad. Her heart went out to him in mingled affection and reverence. She bowed

low with exquisite grace as his eyes fell on her, then advanced to where he stood, and, kneeling, kissed his hand. He assisted her to arise, and, still holding her hand, led her to a sofa.

"Sit, my daughter," he said, "and speak freely. There is none of our subjects to whom we will give a more indulgent ear than to you,"—and he dropped wearily on the divan. "Sit," he repeated, as she remained respectfully standing, "it is our command."

She sat down on the divan, at some distance from him, and turned her eyes on him, waiting for him to speak.

"You have our permission to proceed," he said.

"I come, sire," she began, "to speak to you of my cousin's, Boris Romanoff's, death and to tell you something of the man who is accused of his murder—the American, Frederick Courtland Hardy."

"You have our deepest sympathy in this matter, my daughter," said his Majesty. "I understand from the minister of justice that you loved your cousin—that you were engaged to him."

The Princess remained silent.

"It is sad," continued his Majesty, "very sad, but be assured that, although the case is a somewhat difficult one, full justice shall be done. The American minister has already inquired about the matter,

and has demanded that the fullest investigation be made. These Americans are very meddlesome. I am informed, however, by the minister of foreign affairs that there will be little difficulty in establishing this Hardy's guilt, as he is a dangerous character and has a bad record."

The Princess turned pale as she repeated:

"A dangerous character? A bad record? Will you send for this record, sire, that I may hear it in your Majesty's presence? For I come not to speak against this Hardy, who is accused of murdering my cousin, but to plead for his release, to pray that justice may be done!"

"You—to plead for him?"

"Yes, sire, for he did not kill my cousin. Will your Majesty grant me the favor that I may hear this record read in your Majesty's presence? For I know this Mr. Hardy, and I know much that is good of him, and nothing bad!" The czar rang a bell and commanded a servant to send a confidential secretary to him. Five minutes later an old man entered, a stoop-shouldered old man with a clean-shaven face, whose eyes denoted infinite shrewdness, his manner infinite servility.

"Pypine," said his Majesty, "can you bring to us immediately the record of the American, Hardy,

concerning whom the minister of foreign affairs was speaking to us the other day?"

"Yes, sire," replied Pypine, "a copy was ordered from the chief of police of Moscow and is now in his Excellency's possession."

"Bring it," said the czar, "immediately."

Pypine disappeared.

"While he is gone you may tell us what you know of this American, Hardy, and why you think he did not assassinate your cousin."

"I know that he is a gentleman of high connections in his own country, who has come here to engage in commerce and retrieve his fortunes. My cousin first met him in Japan. This part of the story I have from Boris' own lips. Boris, being hard-pressed by the police, put his telltale papers in Mr. Hardy's overcoat pocket and tried to throw the guilt on him. The plan did not succeed, and Boris suffered many hardships, for which he unjustly blamed Mr. Hardy. I first met him on the Amur River, where I was captured by Chinese brigands. He came to the rescue and saved me from a terrible fate. This still further enraged my cousin, who loved me and was jealous of any one who served me in any way. He was very brave, was Boris, and would have saved me himself, but he

was not there—which certainly was not Mr. Hardy's fault. On the Amur we were again attacked by brigands, and Mr. Hardy, as well as my cousin, fought like a brave man. In my house in Moscow my cousin, who was of a violent nature, insulted the American by offering him money, and, when Mr. Hardy indignantly refused and knocked his check-book out of his hand, struck him in the face. A duel was fought, at which Mr. Hardy, at my request, spared my cousin's life, though he was himself severely wounded. He has wonderful skill with the pistol, and he shot a cuff button from my cousin's sleeve, which he sent me as proof that he had complied with my request. My cousin was boastful of having wounded Mr. Hardy, and I gave him the cuff button and told him its story. He became transported with rage and swore that he would not rest till he had rid the earth of this man. He conceived it his duty to avenge the outraged honor of the Romanoff family, as he expressed it. He thought he must kill this man for other reasons,"—here the Princess halted and blushed.

"Go on," said the czar, kindly and much interested, "this is a most remarkable story! In it this Mr. Hardy appears as a hero!"

"Sire, in Mr. Hardy's employ was a young

Korean boy whose devotion to his master surpassed anything I have ever before heard of. It was more like that of a woman for the man she loves when a woman really loves. This boy—I am ashamed to tell it, sire—but now your Majesty will understand why I have wished to confide in you alone—this boy heard my cousin plotting to kill Mr. Hardy. Your Majesty will understand that my cousin was no longer a sane man; that rage and—and—jealousy, perhaps, had rendered him for the moment irresponsible. The boy, fearing for his master's safety and believing that a Russian nobleman had the power to do anything he wished, stole into my cousin's compartment at night and killed him."

"Wonderful! wonderful!" said the czar in a musical tone; "and are you sure of all this?"

"Absolutely. I give you my word as a Romanoff princess that it is true."

"And the boy? Do you know where he is? He can be given up to justice."

"The boy," replied the Princess solemnly, "no longer exists. Overwhelmed with horror at what he had done, and feeling sure that the police would find and punish him, he has made away with himself. He told me that it was his intention to do away with himself, and he has disappeared!"

At this moment Pypine entered with Hardy's record. At the czar's command he read it, rapidly and in a matter-of-fact, singsong tone. It contained nearly every act of Mr. Hardy's life, except what had actually happened within the four walls of his sleeping chamber, since he had set foot on Russian soil. He was accused of sympathizing with the Japanese, of having affiliated with Jews, of having insulted the authorities at Vladivostok by requesting that the imperial government use its influence to get him a clean towel in the hotel there, with having worn an overcoat similar to the one in the nihilists' den on the evening of the explosion of the Frenchman's famous pill. Furthermore, he had fought a duel with the Prince Romanoff, in which he had been wounded. This fact furnished the motive for his alleged crime, which, coupled with his suspicious record, left little room, in the Russian official mind, for doubt of his guilt. Most of these points had already been covered by the story told by the Princess.

"As for the overcoat," she remarked, "if he continued to wear it he could not have left it, and your Majesty would soon discover, if your Majesty should stop for some time incognito in Vladivostok, that the power of the imperial government is by no

means belittled when it is asked to use its influence in the procuring of a clean towel!"

The emperor arose and pressed his hand to his brow as though he were suffering with headache.

"Little Father," said Romanovna, "this man saved my life, my honor. There are features in the case which, if it is tried, do not reflect credit on my dead cousin's name. Grant my prayer! Let Mr. Hardy be freed, and the report given out that the police have secret proof of his innocence, but are on the track of the real culprit,"—and she sank again on her knees.

"Rise, daughter," said the czar kindly. "We have already decided on this course. It's a relief to know that he is innocent, the American ambassador is so troublesome. Pypine, see that this is done. Tell the proper authorities that it is our will. Pypine, what is the news of the morning?"

"Little, your Imperial Majesty. The cowardly Japanese have sunk two Russian cruisers, treacherously stealing on them in the night; the discontent among the workmen in the iron factories is reported as growing; there has been a small massacre of Jews in Kiev, a trivial affair; a clash between troops and rioters in Helsingfors is reported, quickly suppressed, however, by the troops firing on the riot-

ers; and an abortive plot against the sacred person of your Imperial Majesty has been unearthed and the traitors lodged in prison. In general, the empire is in a state of serenity, and the devotion and love of your Imperial Majesty's faithful subjects amount almost to worship."

Romanovna, making a low obeisance, backed toward the door. The czar had forgotten her. He wrung his white hands nervously, muttering:

"God help me and my poor people! What shall I do?"

In the anteroom without, the Romanovna stopped Pypine and said to him:

"Do you wish me for a friend?"

"Does your Highness take me for a fool?" asked Pypine. "I would do anything in my power to secure your Highness' patronage."

"Then see that his Imperial Majesty's wishes in regard to Mr. Hardy, the American, are carried out immediately. You know how many cares oppress the Little Father's mind."

"He shall be released to-day," replied Pypine.

"I shall not forget it. Where is he now?"

"In the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul."

"Horrible!" gasped the Princess. "He must not sleep there to-night, Pypine!"

CHAPTER XLVI

GRAY GHOSTS

That part of Siberia which lies east of the great inland sea, Lake Baikal, and west of the mighty Amur, which here turns abruptly and bends northward, is known as trans-Baikalia. The Stanovoi range of mountains, continuing to the south, divides it nearly in halves, forming a watershed that feeds the lake on one side and the Amur and its tributaries on the other.

The trans-Siberian railway, the great artery through which the blood of Russia flowed uninterruptedly from Alexandrov to Vladivostok and Port Arthur, pierces these mountains at an advantageous point, and, passing through Stryetensk, breaks into Manchuria.


The time had come when this road would be tested to the utmost, and put to that use which all warlike nations have in view in the building of great roads of any sort,—the transportation to the fron-

tiers of troops and munitions of war. The battle-ships of Japan were pounding away at Port Arthur by sea and her armies were investing it by land.

If this stronghold fell, a dream of empire would fall with her, for Russia had at last so intrenched herself at the threshold of the East and the skirts of the Pacific that she was face to face with the people who dwelt in the islands.

The trans-Siberian railway cuts off a large tract of northern Manchuria, nearly the whole of it, in fact, and those who followed Russian policy for a hundred years back, and read between the lines of her diplomacy believed that she meant simply to absorb and gain possession of this vast and rich territory. Then little, sleepy, filthy Korea would become simply a bit of Russian sea beach, and the very existence of Japan would be imperiled.

No one understood this better than the Japanese themselves, whose statesmen are as far-seeing as any that the world has ever known. The whole Japanese people, too, comprehended the situation, and the nation realized that the time had come when it must fight. They knew, moreover, that they must strike hard in the very beginning of the struggle, and disable their unwieldy but brave and powerful foe while he was still imperfectly prepared.



The blows that they had already struck had staggered the world with their suddenness and crushing effect, and so, along the entire length of the Siberian railway for thousands of miles, trains were thundering, laden with frost-bitten and suffering, but patient, subjects of the czar, coming to the Pacific to shoot down the soldiers of the mikado, or, if the Virgin so willed, to be shot down by them.

On a vast, a colossal, scale, it was an endless trail of ants threading its way across a continent to do battle with another swarm. Without the trans-Siberian road, built and conceived in the beginning for just such a purpose as this, it would have been impossible for the blood of Russia to flow into Manchuria and be spilled there, and the dream of empire would have been still many, many years from fulfilment. Even now there were delays, due to the feebleness of the road-bed and the severe strain to which it was put, as well as to the dearth of rolling stock and supplies. Rails must be laid across Lake Baikal, on the ice, and frequent repairs must be made, while the long ant-trail was interrupted and the poor, shivering ants, sent so many miles to kill, suffered and died of exposure and the bitter cold on the great Siberian plains.

On a river in trans-Baikalia that runs for many

miles parallel with this mighty ant-trail, a sledge was flying eastward, drawn by three horses, all abreast. The river was frozen to the very heart and the snows, drifting over it, had swept and polished its surface till it was smooth as glass. Wrapped in furs and his head shrouded in a thick cap, the driver sat on the forward seat, partly protected by the high-curving dash, and managed the lines. On a low seat behind him were a man and a woman, also wrapped deep in robes of fur, while a third woman sat silent in the bottom of the sledge.

Somewhere behind them the rails had spread and the road had given out and the trains were halted while repairs were made.

There Frederick Courtland Hardy, on his way to Stryetensk, had overtaken the Princess, hastening to the front, undergoing all hardships, entirely forgetful of self, that she might employ her strength, her fortune and her high courage and example in the relief of her wounded and suffering countrymen.

She greeted Hardy with frank friendliness, explained her mission and told him that he had arrived just in time to help her carry out a plan of hers.

“We can take sledges down the river,” she said, “to Petrovska-Zavod, where I have no doubt we

shall be able to catch an outgoing train. I should have started before, but was deterred by the fact that—that—in fact, I was afraid. Now, with my gallant defender of the Amur, I shall have no hesitation in going. Will you come with us,—with my maid and me?”

Thus invited, he could not refuse. In fact, the moment his eyes fell on her, all his resentment vanished. Her gaiety, her coquetry, had disappeared. She was pale and sorrowful, and—need it be said?—more beautiful than ever. What if she had loved Romanoff? Romanoff was dead now, and when a man dies he pays all debts. Why should not Hardy enjoy these few hours in her presence, before taking up again the burden of his life at Stryetensk?

Suppose she was only using him as a convenience? Even so, it is an honor to be a mere convenience for such a woman.

He had heard, too, in a vague way, that it was her testimony that had freed him from prison.

“Yes,” he replied gravely, “I will go. I am overwhelmed by my good fortune. It was too great an honor to be hoped for—that I should ever be of service to your Highness again.”

The mere presence of this woman transformed

him from the merchant into the courtier and polished gentleman.

"You forget," she said, while the ghost of one of her merry smiles lighted up her beautiful features, "that such things are to be said in French."

The maid, Hardy scarcely noticed. She came out at the last moment, her head covered with a fur hood that almost entirely obscured her face, and took her place in the bottom of the sledge.

There were long desolate stretches of snow, with here and there a house, the roof covered with snow, nestling among the white hills.

The bells on the galloping horses crashed musically, and their shod hoofs clattered and rang on the ice.

"We are going almost as fast as the train," remarked the Princess.

"Much faster than the trains which we have just left," replied Hardy, "which are not going at all!"

"Do you know," said Romanovna, "that not so very many months ago, it would have been necessary for me to make the entire journey from Stryetensk to Khabarovka by sledges? There are relays at the different military stations, and one could really have traveled the distance in a comparatively short time, if one found the river frozen all the way."

"I should have been pleased," ventured Hardy, "to serve as your Highness' escort for the entire distance."

The Princess vouchsafed no reply to this, and he had not the courage to glance at her face.

They passed occasional patches of forest, the limbs etched very black and distinct against the background of snow. They had left the town about two o'clock and it was half-past three now.

"There must be a farm-house somewhere near," observed Hardy, "if your Highness feels cold. I saw a large dog running among the trees a moment ago."

Just then the driver pointed with the whip toward the woods and crossed himself. The Princess also made the sign of the cross, and said quietly:

"Those are wolves! May the holy Virgin protect us!"

Two large gray animals with bushy tails, that were dogs and yet not dogs, were seen flitting among the trees. Their tongues hung out of their mouths, and as they glanced from time to time at the sledge and its occupants, their teeth could be plainly seen.

"Have no fear," said Hardy, "they are so few they will not dare to attack."

At that moment a third joined the two and ran with them. They ran easily, flitting along as lightly as thistle-down driven by the wind. The driver arose in his seat and cracked his whip over the horses' heads.

"Be careful, Ivan," said the Princess, "do not tire them out. How far is it yet to Petrovska?"

"Twenty versts," he replied, "we should make it in something over an hour, if the horses hold out. It was near here over a year ago that Farmer Gogol was dragged from his sledge by wolves and devoured. I had not heard of many being seen this year. The Virgin defend us!"

For at this moment one of the animals emitted a long, mournful howl, the most dismal and terrible sound in nature.

"I beg of your Highness not to be—" commenced Hardy, but she laid her hand on his arm, and whispered:

"Listen!"

Far in the depths of the forest an answering howl was heard, then another, farther away, and still others, both up and down the river.

One of the wolves, flitting along the bank, lifted up his voice, to be in turn answered by a sporadic chorus from the forest.

There were now six wolves in sight, drifting out and in among the trees like gray ghosts.

Soon one of these tripped lightly through the snow down the river bank and trotted along after the sledge on the ice, like a faithful dog.

"They show no signs of attacking," said Hardy.

"They are famished," said the Princess, "but they are as patient as death, and as intelligent as humans. They are too few yet."

A second and a third joined the two on the river, while the pack on the bank steadily grew, and noiselessly, save for an occasional call into the deeps for help.

The maid sat motionless, without looking up or stirring.

Hardy lifted a rifle from the bottom of the sledge.

"I could kill one of them now," he said, "and perhaps that would scare them away."

"It is not time yet, my friend," replied the Princess. "I shall tell you. I am a Russian and I know when to shoot. You must not waste a single shot. Nothing would scare them away," she added.

The *isvoschik* was using all his strength to keep his horses from exhausting themselves in one wild dash. Snorting with fear, they were tearing down the long ribbon of ice at terrific speed.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE GIFT OF AISOME

Not more than ten minutes in all could have elapsed since the appearance of the first wolf, and they had already gathered in terrifying numbers.

“How far is it yet to Petrovska?” asked Hardy.

“About twenty versts,” replied the man, “we can make it in an hour if the horses hold out.”

“But this is the same answer that he gave before!” said Hardy.

“He means that it is a long way,” explained the Princess. “Twenty versts—about twenty versts! I fear the horses can not run so far!”

“But the wolves?” asked Hardy; “will they not also tire?”

“They are very hungry,” replied the Princess; “they could run for ever!”

At this moment the entire pack wheeled, as if at a word of command, and drifted obliquely down on the ice. Some ran beside the sledge, a couple of

rods away, while those in the rear came up closer. Though the maddened horses were going at their utmost speed, their hoofs making a confused and incredibly rapid clatter on the ice, the fierce, wild dogs simply drifted, drifted along, without the least seeming effort. The pack was evidently nearly complete now, though an occasional gray form would flit out from among the trees, stand and look with lifted head, and then join the chase with a long, easy lope.

The little maid, crouched in the bottom of the sledge and bundled in furs, still remained motionless, speechless, as though paralyzed with terror. The Princess sat erect, looking straight ahead, the seal of a sublime courage set on her pale, noble brow. The blood of the Romanoff did not fear to die. She turned to the man at her side and smiled sweetly—more sweetly than he had ever seen woman smile before.

“Forgive me, my friend,” she said, “for bringing you into this fearful danger.”

“I thank God,” cried Hardy, “that I am here and nowhere else!”

His voice rang out with sudden fervor, with a sob of joy.

“Thank you, my friend,” said the Princess simply.

"May I shoot now?" asked Hardy.

Several of the wolves were close to one of the horses, and were looking up at the animal's throat. This was the horse that was running free; he was crowded against the other two of the team in his terror.

"Not yet, not quite yet," replied the Princess, "they become maddened when they smell blood."

A moment later a wolf darted suddenly in and leaped at the throat of the horse, which reared, snorted with terror, and then bounded ahead with a sudden burst of incredible speed.

Hardy arose, and leaning against the driver's seat, took quick aim and fired at this particular wolf, the one that had begun the attack in earnest. He fell kicking and writhing on the ice and instantly the entire pack huddled above and about him, snarling, snapping, scrambling, tearing,—an indiscriminate mass of fur and fury, teeth and hunger.

"There are eleven shots in the magazine, and five in the revolver," said Hardy, who saw a ray of hope in this action of the wolves. "With care, they should last us to Petrovska. How far is it yet to Petrovska, Ivan?" he shouted.

"About twenty versts," replied Ivan, "we should reach it in—"

Hardy glanced behind. The struggling, snarling mass was still there on the ice, but already several members of the pack had left it and were taking up the chase again. He stood watching them as they came on in a line, leaving the carcass one by one. In less than five minutes they were all back by the sledge again, and the low sun was shining on a white pile of bones, that could be distinctly seen, far back on the river.

"It doesn't take long," muttered Hardy, "if it must come."

Then he thought of the Princess, shuddered and breathed a prayer.

And still the horses ran on and on; the sledge was light and they were winged with terror. Again and again, Hardy shot—shot as never before and seldom missed. The fire of battle was in his veins, that fierce and deadly mastery of self that exalts a brave man when he both hunts and is hunted.

"Have courage," he cried, "we shall reach Petrovska yet!"

But now the chase took on a new and more dangerous feature. When a wolf was killed, not all of the pack dropped behind to devour him.

One, more bold than the others, sprang up at the back of the sledge as if to leap in, and Hardy, firing

into the open mouth, fairly blew the fierce creature's head off. The flash and explosion for a moment terrified the following pack and caused it to drop back. He turned and aimed at an animal that was snapping at one of the horses, but, when he pulled the trigger, no report ensued. His face blanched as he dropped the weapon, and drew his revolver. The shots in the magazine of the rifle were all exhausted! In this moment's delay a wolf succeeded in fastening its fangs in the horse's flank, and hung there, snarling. The unfortunate steed leaped forward with such violence that the traces parted, and instantly all the wolves were tearing at him, pulling him down. The Princess had never before heard a horse scream in terror. It is a sound seldom heard except in battle.

"God have mercy! God have mercy!" she groaned.

"Have courage," cried Hardy, "he will soon be out of his agony, and I think his death has saved our lives."

The two remaining horses did not seem to notice the loss of their companion, as the sledge glided easily over the smooth ice. They still ran nobly on, though they were reeking with steam.

The sledge came to a bend in the river, and for a moment its occupants lost sight of the wolves.

"Perhaps they have given up the chase," said Hardy; "perhaps, too, they are satisfied with the horse."

But the Princess shook her head.

"They will never give over the chase," she said, and, at that moment, a gray form flitted around the bend in the river; two, three, half a dozen, and soon twenty or thirty of the pack were again about the sledge, leaping at it and at the horses with sharp, short yelps and snarls, their red tongues lolling, their jaws flecked with blood and foam.

"There! there!" cried the *isvoschik*, pointing down the river, with the handle of his whip. "Petrovska! Petrovska! Bless the Virgin!"

The rays of the setting sun fell full on the dome of a Greek church, but it was a conspicuous object and far away.

A wolf was hanging to the neck of one of the horses. Him Hardy shot, and, leaning over the curved dash, discharged his weapon into the body of another that was clinging to the other horse.

"Elizabetha," he said, turning to the Princess, his face white but glorified, "that is the last shot. If there were but one more, we might reach Petrovska. Here, with Death for a witness, I tell you that I love you. In the presence of Death, there is no

rank, there are no princesses, no merchants. I love you, dear."

She arose and threw herself on his breast. For a long minute they stood thus, clasped in each other's arms, lip to lip, forgetful even of death itself.

The wolves came on again. They ran snarling up to the rear of the sledge, for the last attack.

Then the little maid, seated on the floor, arose from her bundle of furs and tore the hood from her head. The rays of the setting sun were shining in her face.

"Look into my eyes once more," she cried; "oh, let me look on your face again—one long, last look!"

Hardy raised his head.

"Aisome! Wang!" he gasped in wonder and could say no more.

"Farewell, my beloved!" and her voice sounded like the voice of a priestess, chanting, "I give you to her and to happiness—I, who have loved you the most!" and she leaped among the wolves.

A path beaten in the snow led up the river bank, into the outskirts of Petrovska, and up this the tired horses dashed, their noble run at an end.

Several of the wolves followed even to the top of the bank, glanced at the houses and the villagers

arming from them, and slunk away. One of the rses, his strong heart bursting, fell dead beside his ate. With tears streaming down his cheeks, ardy stood erect in the sledge, holding the swoon-ig Princess in his arms.

THE END

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